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ISSUE **219** JULY/AUGUST 2024 US \$13.95 CAN \$14.95



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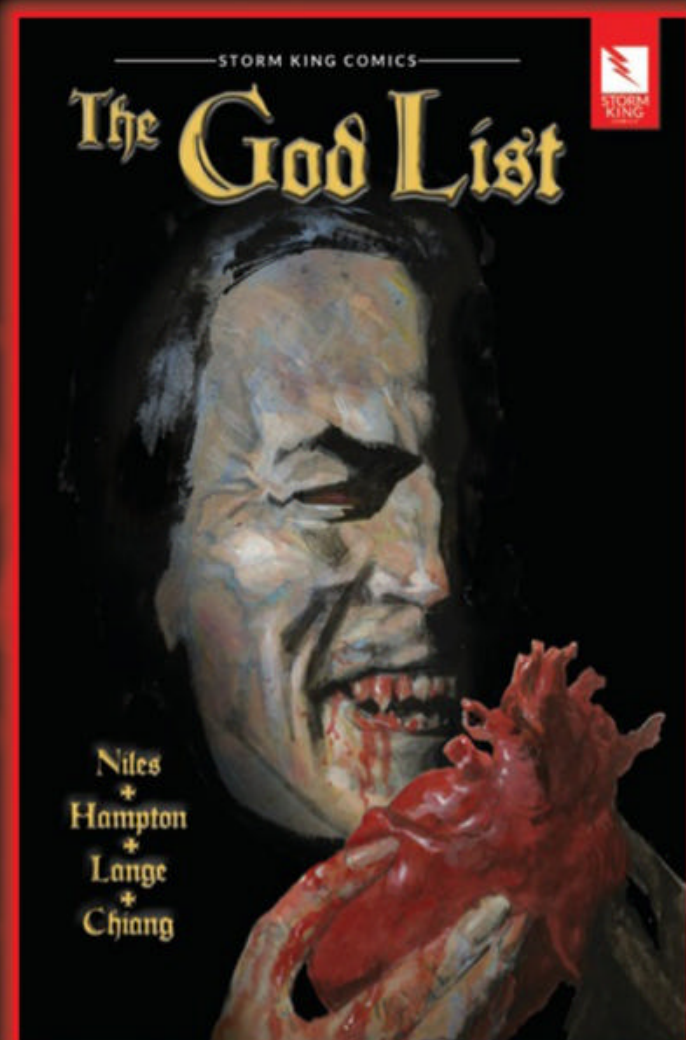
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Art by Trevor Denham with Ryan Winn

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Written by Steve Niles and Scott Hampton
Art by Scott Hampton with Jennifer Lange

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Filmmaker Osgood “Oz” Perkins returns with his fourth horror film, a police procedural steeped in sadism, occult ritual... and Nicolas Cage.

PLUS! Oz talks about a career making horror movies, and shares thoughts about his father, the late, great Anthony Perkins.

by **ANDREA SUBISSATI**

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DAWN OF THE WOMEN

I Spit on Your Celluloid, an exhaustively researched new book from Etheria Film Festival co-founder Heidi Honeycutt, proves that horror has always run red with the feminine gaze.

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Oh, Canada.

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NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND

Seeing as the stats show that most of you reside in the land of liberty, opportunity, and Dunkin' Donuts on every corner, let me fill you in on a thing or two about living while Canadian. Having grown up before the bounties offered by streaming services and e-commerce came to fruition, it often felt like I lived much further from your border than I actually did – Target, T.J. Maxx, and Macy's were mythical spaces only whispered about by travellers, and the cosmetics advertised in my teen fashion magazines would never ship to the Great White North, even if they accepted our colourful *Monopoly* money. Moreover, Hollywood was like another planet, one that sent flying saucers to our cities to abduct any promising Canadian showbiz talent (save of course, for the family Cronenberg, who may as well appear on our currency by now, and for George A. Romero, who sought residency here for reasons we can only speculate have to do with resources necessary for the imminent zombie apocalypse). Even Canadian Geese bail on Canada when winter hits, blithely disloyal to their own damn namesake.

I've been largely good-natured about jibes that Canada is America's plaid flannel hat, sitting precariously atop a sleeping lion with a pissy temper, and I may even be guilty of a wee bit of smugness when American politics started to so closely resemble sketch comedy that CNN became indistinguishable with *SNL*. Nowadays, I'm fine to drive a few hours south for a Shake Shack black-and-white, or stock up on Ulta and Trader Joe's on my annual trip to Salem. But, my friends, what grinds my gears about my six-digit postal code has to do with putting together this here magazine, as distribution companies and PR agencies still tend to think of Canada as a third-world country, watching *Hilarious House of Frightenstein* by candlelight while beavers bay in the distance.

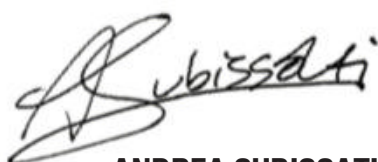
Here's where I'm going with this, wretched readers; allow me to lift my proverbial skirts to show you how the sausage is made (a questionable combination of metaphors, I agree). In order to give a piece of material the *Rue Morgue* Treatment™ as I like to call it, we require what I've come to refer to as the holy trifecta of assets: a screener of the material in question, an interview with the talent involved, and enough solid art for our talented Shane Mills to spit shine into a spread that meets the soaring standard that my *RM* forebears have put before me. Sounds easy enough, no? Surely these goods are readily available to a periodical as respected as ours, and what horror creative wouldn't bend over backwards to be featured in our pages?

Alas, my lovelies, the reality is that the trifecta remains a tall ask for an independent print periodical that isn't a mere ice-skate away from American film fests and red carpet premieres. Even through email, I can practically see a PR person wince as they reply that "oh, jeez, I dunno about that, I'll have to get some kind of weird international approval on par with the most convoluted immigration paperwork to get you those assets on time, if at all." And weirdest of all, it tends to be the images that are the stickiest sticking point, as if pixels need a damn visa to work in Canada. What gives?

I try not to kvetch about these things too publicly, lest I be accused of griping about the difficulties of my "dream job" (or using words like *kvetch* when I'm not Jewish, for that matter), but I just wanna make the best damn magazine I can and it grinds my gears to be consistently told that I can have this but not that, and that I should be somehow grateful for the opportunity to write a puff piece on how great a movie is that I haven't even fucking seen. I won't do that, full stop. Stories will run here if they're not only *Rue Morgue*-worthy, but *Rue Morgue*-ready, and if that limits my fishing pond to a lesser Great Lake, then douse me in maple syrup and roll me in poutine, because I'm not here to play shinny.

So, before you close this issue to Google all the nonsense Canadian-ese I've just spouted, remember that no print periodical can compete with the internet in terms of variety and immediacy. And heck, would you pay cover price for *Rue Morgue* if we spouted the same stories you saw on your Facebook feed?

By the time this issue hits stands, both Canada and the U.S. will have celebrated their respective birthdays and toasted their relative positions as sites of power, privilege, and soaring inequality rates. So from the yankees to the hosers and everyone in between, cheers! And share the horror love, eh?



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Horror in Culture & Entertainment

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POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



THANKS SO MUCH for the interview with Caitlin Cronenberg [in *RM#218*]. *Humane* is one of the best first-time directorial efforts ever. Great script, fantastic cast, and confident direction. Her mastery of photographic composition is evident in every frame. Can't wait to see her next effort. Thanks again for being the undisputed leader in horror media coverage.

JOE PORTER, VIA EMAIL

YOU KNOW IT'S A GOOD YEAR when the daughters of the masters are making their own horror movies. Thanks *Rue Morgue* for shining the spotlight.

KEVKEV, VIA EMAIL

JUST WANT TO SAY I've been loving the magazine since I picked up my first issue back in 2003. I enjoy how it covers the full spectrum of horror but in particular books and film. I was thinking it would be great to feature an issue on disability representation in horror as there is so much to explore. Unfortunately, much of our beloved genre still has many stereotypes about disability where people with disabilities are not cast in roles, or are depicted as monsters, or others to be feared. Very rarely do you find a film where the protagonist is a person with a disability who is not simply a victim, but a person who takes action against the evil force/antagonist. I can think of only one recent entry: the 2020 thriller/horror movie *Run*, which featured a person who uses a wheelchair in real life as the hero. Just food for thought. I do love how your magazine delves deeper into issues of diversity and puts the spotlight on those issues. Keep up the excellent work!

BRIAN PEDERSEN, VIA EMAIL

I SAW YOU FEATURED *In a Violent Nature* in *RM#218* – another independent horror movie bringing back the gore of the 1970s and 1980s. I finally got around to seeing it and, while I did think it was quite slow in parts, I have to say some of those kill scenes really made my week. Sean Cunningham and Joseph Zito would be proud! Thanks *Rue*.

JEFF K., VIA EMAIL

RE: SYMPATHY FOR THE SEQUEL on *Rue Morgue TV* – *Alien 3* is not an adrenaline-spiker like *Alien* or *Aliens*, because *Alien 3* is just not a creature

feature – it's a film about death. Not only that, it's a film about confronting and accepting death, and what can be achieved when that happens. The result is nothing less than the kind of exercise in existentialism novelist Albert Camus might have made if he'd gone into horror flicks.

ANDREW LOWRY, VIA YOUTUBE

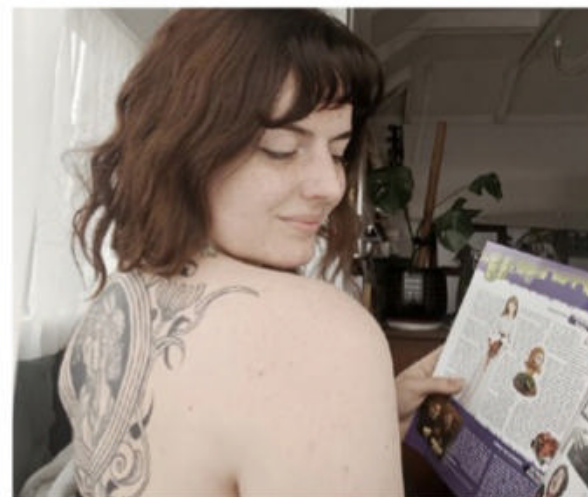


HOW COOL IS THIS? Thank you so much *Rue Morgue* for featuring the Amicus Productions revival a little while back.

MEGAN TREMETHICK, VIA INSTAGRAM

RE: STOP-MOTION ANIMATION WORKSHOP with *Psycho Goreman* director Steve Kostanski on *Rue Morgue TV* – This was awesome. Steve seems like such a chill, massively creative guy. Re: stop-motion editing – a fan took a scene from *Robocop* and re-edited it so that its movement was smooth. The majority of us were very appreciative of the re-editor's work but we liked the clunky motion better. It works with the character. I need more fantasy horror including stop-motion!

LIL BOOZI BERT, VIA YOUTUBE



I GOT INTERVIEWED AND PUBLISHED in an international magazine and I am quietly very, very stoked about it. Thank you, Andrea, for reaching out.

JEMMA E, OTEPOTI RENAISSANCE

RE: SYMPATHY FOR THE SEQUEL on *Rue Morgue TV* – I love both cuts of *Alien 3* but the Assembly Cut is far superior than the theatrical cut. It fixes a lot of the pacing issues and also reintroduces a lot of missing scenes. Oh, and it rectified the problem with the toxic waste disposal that's seen/mentioned but never used. This isn't a pleasant film and I think [David] Fincher did incredible even though the studio fucked his vision up so badly. Not to mention his DP, the legendary Jordan Cronenweth, had to leave the shoot due to his advancing Parkinson's. I went to art college not far from where they filmed the EEV impact and Ripley washing up on the beach (Blast Beach in Seaham, North East England). Also, parts of the blast furnaces that are on the Tees Estuary feature in the matte paintings, although they filmed some scenes at Blyth Power Station. It's worth noting that the same area of the Tees Estuary was the influence for the opening sequence of *Blade Runner*. Ridley Scott attended the same college. Due to growing up in the area, he took a lot of inspiration from the blast furnaces and oil refineries that dotted the landscape.

@JASONLAPLANT1348, VIA YOUTUBE

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POST MORTEM

C/O RUE MORGUE MAGAZINE

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LETTERS MAY BE EDITED FOR LENGTH AND/OR CONTENT.



CORONER'S REPORT

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

ISSUE #
219

Exploding Head Syndrome is a condition where a person experiences a loud auditory hallucination when either falling asleep or waking up.

Bruce Campbell was an early choice to play Louis Creed in 1989's *Pet Sematary*.

Three out of the first five Presidents of the United States passed away on July 4th, America's Independence Day.

To achieve the scene where a priest is swarmed by flies in 1979's *The Amityville Horror*, actor Rod Steiger's head was rubbed with honey.

Treadmills were used as punishment devices on British prisoners for most of the 19th century.

The character Hannibal Lecter was inspired by Mexican serial killer Dr. Alfredo Ballí Treviño, who had many of the mannerisms portrayed by Anthony Hopkins in *The Silence of the Lambs*.

Former New Kid on the Block Donnie Wahlberg lost over 40 pounds for his brief role in 1999's *The Sixth Sense*.

Last year in South Korea, an employee at a pepper sorting plant was killed when a robotic arm's sensors mistook him for a box of vegetables, picking him up and crushing him into a conveyor belt.

Willem Dafoe had intended to do his own nude scenes for 2009's *Antichrist*, but director Lars von Trier decided he was too well-endowed and audiences may find it distracting, so he went with a body double instead.

Several months before he was accused of murder, O.J. Simpson received combative knife training to act in a TV pilot about Navy Seals called *Frogmen*. The show never aired.

The house used in Ti West's 2009 film *The House of the Devil* was infested with ladybugs, which can be seen in various shots throughout the movie.

In 1860, a water treatment device in London, England, known as the Aldgate Pump, caused hundreds of deaths due to the water supply becoming contaminated with decayed matter from the bodies of a nearby graveyard.

The Black Church in 1994's *In the Mouth of Madness* is actually the Cathedral of the Transfiguration in Markham, Ontario.

COMPILED BY JAY CLARKE
GOT A WEIRD STAT OR MORBID FACT?
SEND IT TO: INFO@RUE-MORGUE.COM



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HOMICIDE ☐

EXPIRING MINDS

ON RUE MORGUE'S
SOCIAL MEDIA

What movie do you wish the late, great Roger Corman would have made?

If there was an alternate universe, a Roger Corman-helmed version of *Re-Animator*. I'd love to see it.

JIM COMEAU, VIA FACEBOOK

Another *Battle Beyond the Stars* movie!

@JWEINRUB1, VIA INSTAGRAM

I wish he'd directed *Dracula Unbound*. Brian Aldiss pitched it to him in the 1990s but it never got made as a film. Brian did rework it into a novel.

DOUG BROWNING, VIA FACEBOOK

I would like to see him make just about anything if he was turned loose with a big budget. *Iron Man* with Bruce Campbell as Tony Stark.

RICK ZOTZMAN, VIA FACEBOOK

Dances With Wolves.

MARK BARNETT, VIA FACEBOOK



FINAL WORDS

AS CAPTIONED BY YOU ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA



"IT'S A NASTY HABIT, BUT I JUST CAN'T STOP BITING MY NAILS!"

THIS MONTH'S CAPTION CONTEST WINNER IS
MICHAEL GATES, VIA FACEBOOK

Follow us on Facebook, X and Instagram for a chance to have your Final Words!



THE DAB TSOG IS COMING FOR YOU

When Wes Craven made *A Nightmare on Elm Street* in 1984, he turned the slasher genre on its head by injecting a heavy dose of the fantastical with everyone's favourite dream-stalking child killer, Freddy Krueger. Audiences were thrilled by the concept of one's own nightmares conjuring a hellish reality that could actually kill you. As it turns out, Craven looked no further than local headlines to find a phenomenon with a higher body count than a certain claw-gloved burn victim could dream of.

In an interview in *Vulture*, Craven recalls a story in the *Los Angeles Times* about a family from Cambodia with a young boy who had such horrible nightmares that he was afraid to fall asleep. When he finally did nod off, his parents were awakened by his screams in the middle of the night only to find him dead by the time they got to his room.

Terrifyingly, this was not an isolated incident. The *Times* covered a whole series of similar deaths, most of which focused on Laotian refugees in the U.S. dying in their

sleep with no previous symptoms and no physiological explanation as to what caused it. In 38 cases reported between 1977 and 1981, most victims were men and many were from the Hmong community, a group of Chinese immigrants who had fled to Vietnam and Laos in the 19th century only to have to flee to America after the Vietnam War.

Coined Sudden Unexpected Nocturnal Death Syndrome (SUNDS), these nocturnal fatalities baffled doctors at the time. Some theorized trauma from the war or exposure to chemical weapons as the culprit, but Hmong elders blamed the *dab tsog*, a malevolent spirit known to suffocate people in their sleep. While the theory obviously didn't gain traction in the medical community, a 2011 study performed by Dr. Shelley Adler proposed that while the *dab tsog* might not have been real, people's belief in it could be enough to kill them.

Craven likely didn't know about the *dab tsog*, only the general idea that would later come to be known as SUNDS, but it's a macabre coincidence that both Freddy Krueger and the *dab tsog* thrive when their victims



are isolated. Adler posits that the U.S. was ill-equipped to provide the mental health support the people in the Hmong community needed, similar to the woefully inept parents of Elm St. If I should die before I wake, indeed.

BRYAN CHRISTOPHER

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...

Bill Bryan, the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man from *Ghostbusters* (1984)

◀ A creature fabricator first and foremost, Bill Bryan was also frequently the actor who climbed inside his creations to bring them to life. This was how he came to embody everyone's favourite confectionary mascot/demonic *kaiju*, a gig he secured as a result of his work on David Lynch's *Dune* the same year. Bryan has continued to work prolifically both behind and in front of the camera right up to the present, becoming known as "The Wizard of Foam and Plastic" in the process. On-screen appearances include portraying a fe-

rocious Pit Deadite in *Army of Darkness* and Grouchy the Slug Guy in *Men in Black*, while having spent fifteen years working with FX legend Steve Johnson and teaching at the Stan Winston School of Character Arts. Forty years on from his most iconic role, Bryan contributed both fabrication and concepts for 2024's *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire*, including work on Slimer and the Possessor.

LOUIS FLETCHER



NEEDFUL THINGS



1 THE LIGHTHOUSE GROOMING SET

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Just because you spend your life isolated in a lighthouse and on the brink of madness is no excuse for smelling like a dead seagull. This grooming set is fit for the saltiest of seamen, containing beard oil and a mermaid-shaped lathering soap in collaboration with NY-based boutique perfumer Joya. Your lighthousehousemate will thank ye!

Shop.a24films.com

1



2 FINAL GIRLS HELVETICA NAMES T-SHIRT

\$29.95 CAD

Naming the four most epic final girls of horror is easy. The hard part is choosing between Cat and Bat Designs' many Helvetica names shirts – from the genre's top slasher icons to Anne Rice vampiverse members to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s original Scooby squad. At least choosing a colour isn't as daunting... Available only in black!

Etsy.ca/ca/shop/catandbatdesigns.com

2



3 BAG O' BEACH BONES

\$35.50 CAD

Be the coolest ghoul at the beach by turning it into a coastline crime scene! This set of fifteen plastic bone moulds contains everything you need to assemble a sandy seaside skeleton in any position your dark heart desires. Roll dem dry bones and nobody will suspect what's buried beneath...

Supertoy.ca

3



4 GHOSTFACE MINI BACKPACK

\$66.99 CAD

Finally, a fashionable and totally not obvious place to stash all the essentials: cloak, mask, oversized kitchen knife, and voice modulator device. Not only is this backpack spacious and durable with high-quality materials and a custom knife-shaped zipper pull, the stitched leather applique glows in the dark! Backpacks don't create psychos; they just make them more stylish.

Amazon.com/bioworld

4



5 ELIZABAT KITCHEN SCISSORS

\$22 USD

Pass the scissors? Excuse me, she has a name. Meet Elizabat, your new kitchen familiar, with a flair for the dramatic to go with her practical magic. Easy to clean and made of stainless food-safe steel, she's (blood) thirsty to tackle your every kitchen need, from snipping herbs to cracking beers and everything in between.

Witchinghourbaby.com

5



HANDMADE HORRORS



Traditional jewellery exists to adorn the surface of the body; from statement necklaces perched on proud shoulders to fingers dripping with diamonds, we cover ourselves with precious metals and stones to draw admiring eyes and enhance the outer beauty of our physical form. Jewellery designer Faruk Özcan reverses this age-old practice by bringing the body's inner elements to the surface in designs that highlight the anatomical details lurking beneath the skin. From skulls held in disembodied hands to realistic hearts on heavy chains, Özcan specializes in handmade pieces that fuse mythology, religion, and nature into what the artist calls an "ethnic pool."

"The concept of Memento Mori has its roots in the philosophers of classical antiquity and Christianity, and appeared in funerary art and architecture from the medieval period onwards," Özcan tells *Rue Morgue*. "I attach great importance to the fact that the work I do

MOKO ART DESIGNS

is anatomically realistic and includes every detail."

Following a childhood spent in jewellery workshops and a series of apprenticeships in Istanbul's prestigious Grand Bazaar, Özcan founded Moko Art Design, an independent studio dedicated to blending traditional technique with the artisan's talent for carving and sculpture.

"I do all my works using pencil craftsmanship," he reveals, "which is a traditional craft used by old Ottoman Armenian masters, and the sculpture-carving technique, which is my field of interest."

Özcan's Memento Mori series takes inspiration from human anatomy and baroque art, paying homage to the concept's mortal roots by meticulously treating each piece's raw materials.

"All of these pieces were created as part of a collection built on our mortality – an adventure based on

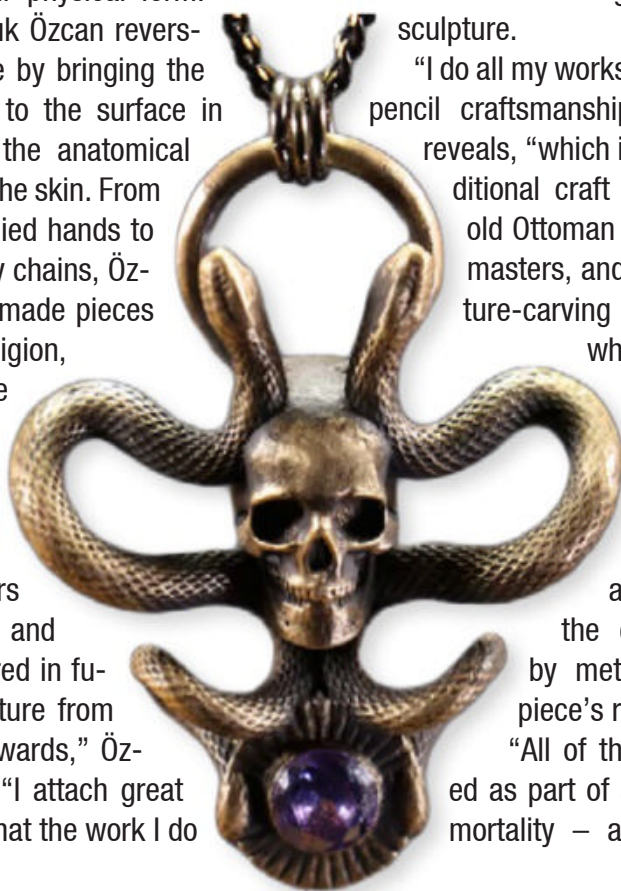
the intertwining nature of life and death," he explains. "I oxidize and darken the bronze metal when creating my designs to give it an aged appearance and to make it look as if it had come out of the ground."

Some pieces feature fully exposed skulls clutched in skeletal hands while others show cranial bones emerging from bisected faces. Figures of Greek mythology such as Poseidon and Hercules intermingle with classical reference material including Venus de Milo and Michelangelo's David.

"Creating the highest possible realism in some designs such as the eye, heart, and brain may seem macabre to some people but, for me, the concepts are intertwined," he says. "[My work] seeks to combine the quiet intimacy and elegance of jewellery with the magic of storytelling: narratives born from myths, cultures, and stories both new and old."

Find [ArtJewelryByMoko](#) on Etsy and on Instagram @mokoartdesign.

JENN ADAMS



CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES

JAWS 2 ADVENTURE-ACTIVITY BOOK

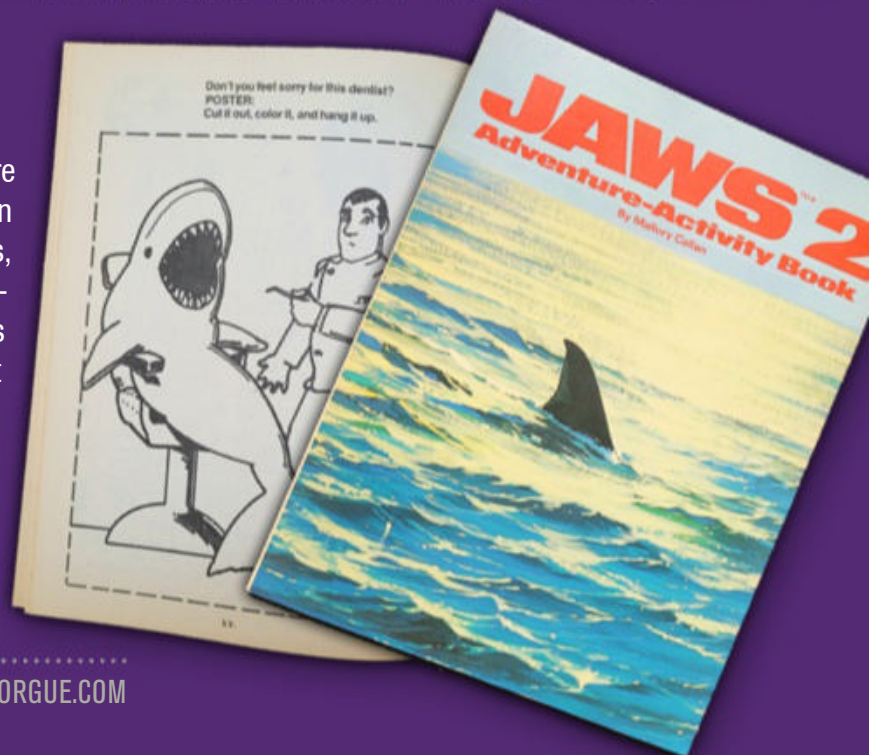
(Grosset & Dunlap, 1978)

The inevitable sequel to the original summer blockbuster, 1978's *Jaws 2* spawned a boatload of merchandise, including a set of trading cards, a tie-in novelization, comic book adaptation, a soundtrack album of John Williams' score, and an unusual "Adventure-Activity Book" published by Grosset & Dunlap. Illustrated by artist Mallory Callan, the 64-page workbook features crossword puzzles, mazes, connect-the-dots games, and drawings to colour. What separates this from most *Jaws 2* memorabilia is that apart from the shark fin in the cover art, the book does not reference any of the characters or plot points from the film (although a Universal copy-

right appears inside). Instead, we are curiously presented with cute cartoon illustrations of sharks, smiling divers, and happy-looking sea creatures. Highlights include birthday party invitations and get-well cards to colour and cut out, and a poster of a dentist with a shark for a patient. Copies in unused condition can be found for between \$40 and \$50 on [eBay](#).

JAMES BURRELL

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FILMMAKER **OSGOOD “OZ” PERKINS** RETURNS WITH HIS FOURTH HORROR FILM, A
POLICE PROCEDURAL STEEPED IN SADISM, OCCULT RITUAL... AND NICOLAS CAGE

BLACKEST MAGICK

BY **ANDREA SUBISSATI**



Unhappy Medium: Junior FBI agent Lee Harker (Maika Monroe) finds herself at the centre of a serial killer's web.

You may not spot the handsome, six-foot-four Osgood “Oz” Perkins on the red carpet at the Met Gala or chasing paparazzi off his lawn, but horror has its own A-listers and Perkins has fast become one. Between a lifetime in showbiz that started early (namely a bit part in 1983’s *Psycho II* as a young Norman Bates, alongside his father Anthony Perkins who reprises his career-making role) and supporting roles in such Hollywood hits as *Legally Blonde* and 2009’s *Star Trek* reboot, he’s no stranger to the film set. But after earning a degree in English, the actor turned his attention to the other side of the camera – and the darker side of cinema – with writing/directing credits for 2015’s sleeper hit *February* (previously titled *The Blackcoat’s Daughter*), 2016’s *I Am the Pretty Thing That Lives in the House* and his 2020 horror fantasy *Gretel & Hansel*. Now firmly among the genre’s elite, Perkins returns with a chilling serial killer yarn in *Longlegs*, out July 12 from Neon.

Written and directed by Perkins and starring Nicolas Cage in the eponymous role and Maika Monroe as the young FBI agent on his tail, *Longlegs* is a police procedural steeped in occult ritualism, sadistic violence, and the kind of family ties that throttle. Monroe plays Lee Harker, a rookie agent whose intuitive abilities to find patterns in brutal acts of violence border on clairvoyant. She’s assigned to investigate a rash of gruesome family murder/suicides that are seemingly at the behest of a third party, a mysterious presence whose malevolence looms over the bloodbath even though he’s never actually present at the scene. Invading these homes via coded letters and strange care packages, the sadistic Longlegs strikes on children’s birthdays, turning treasured family gatherings into grisly crime

scenes that leave law enforcement stumped and horrified. Can Harker stop him before he claims his next victims, or does she somehow play another role in his hideous vision?

Disturbing, atmospheric, and steeped in dread, *Longlegs*’ mystery draws you into its web even as it promises more horrifying things to come. Highly anticipated since the teaser trailers dropped in January, it’s the latest chapter in Perkins’ ever-growing filmography of slow-burn indie hits that buck genre conventions while delivering the chills to summer cinemas. *Rue Morgue* caught up with the New York-based auteur to dish on family values, genre boundaries, and one guest you definitely don’t want at your birthday party.

You were born into cinema royalty, when did your own affinity for movies begin?

It’s one of those things where it’s sort of always in the hum, like in your environment, and environments are so important to anything, right, like things grow in certain environments. To some degree, [film love] was always just there. So, it becomes sort of, subliminal is not the right word, but it just becomes part of what you’re taking in all the time, so I think it was catching. And then when I was thirteen or fourteen, we got a video camera – this was 1987 or so – and I just started doing what everybody does with their friends: you dress up in capes and whatever masks you have and you make stupid things. You don’t think about it. I wasn’t thinking about it beyond that.

Was there a particular film that made you want to take it more seriously?

There’s always, of course, movies that launch you into a deeper understanding, where you have that kind of aha moment. For me it was *Beetlejuice*. *Beetlejuice* was the movie that made me

say, “Oh, I get it. Someone chooses this stuff. It didn’t have to be this way. This movie is like this because somebody said this and not that.”

Have you ever frightened yourself with one of your own ideas? Ever weirded yourself out?

No, because – I don’t want to say that I don’t take it seriously, but I don’t take it seriously. I think more than anything, for me, and maybe for everybody on some level, horror movies are just about processing death or the inevitability of things, all that we don’t understand or know, and what’s coming for us, one way or another. And god knows, our culture doesn’t celebrate it; it makes death feel like a thing you should try to avoid as opposed to something you try to celebrate in other cultures. But no, I do it all with a little bit of a smirk. We’ll be shooting something, or I’ll see something we cut together and be like, “Oh fuck, that’s wild!” I guess that’s me, that’s part of my shadow self. I mean, no one else put it out there, so I guess it’s me.

Tell me a bit about coming up with the character of Longlegs; what inspired his appearance and characteristics?

The character of Longlegs was sort of sniffing around the edg-



"WHAT AM I GONNA DO? TELL NICOLAS CAGE WHAT TO DO?"

— OZ PERKINS

es of other things that I was writing. If you're a writer like me, you're always writing things, and you've always got a drawer full of stuff that you can't deal with [at the moment], or things that you love but no one else understands, or things that half-work, or great sections of things, and [writers are] always taking from those. I do, anyway — it's like free shopping, right? Like it's your stuff, you might as well take it on. So [Longlegs] was always on the liminal edge of things. For the longest time, he was very black with a lot of black hair and a black hat and a black suit. The white face was always a thing, and he would show up to people's houses on their birthdays and do different things and have little shows that he would put on. He had his station wagon or a van and would bring out little player pianos and little stuffed animals and stuff. He had this weird sort of wanting-to-entertain quality, but he's nervous; like "it's my first time trying to do a kids birthday party and I'm nervous about it," and there was something weird and creepy about that for me. He lived in this in-between place and then when you go at [the idea] hard enough for long enough, you break the thing and then "Ah, it's sort of a *Silence of the Lambs* thing," and he's the killer. But he's not really the killer but it's that sort of thing. Then, as far as character design goes, that becomes a partnership with not only Nicolas Cage, but with the makeup and hair and costume [departments], and we all bring our best selves to it. I didn't go into dressing him with a preconceived notion.

It's interesting that you bring up Silence of the Lambs, because I picked up on that connection quickly, but I also felt shades of the Zodiac Killer and even John Wayne Gacy. Did you draw inspiration from real-life serial killers?

I don't like serial killers; that stuff really scares me, and it puts me off in a significant way. I don't in any way ever fetishize or glorify [them]. In the most craven possible way, if you're an independent filmmaker, and you want to find an audience, you can keep trying to do your esoteric thing until somebody gives in, or you can say, "What shape of this idea would be palatable?" so you can get it in the door, right? You can get your foot in the door by saying, "Well, it's sort of *Silence of the Lambs*." It's a young female detective and she's out of her element and she's not really the right person for the job, and she's sort of chasing this guy. Everybody knows what



Birthdate Bait: Longlegs' hideous crime spree targets families with young children who were born on the fourteenth of the month, perplexing investigators.

that is, and so you buy narrative credit with the reader, with the audience, with the actors, with the artists who are working on the movie with you. You buy some credit to then go and make your own left turn [on the idea], and that's fun. And again, part of what I'd say I'd do was with

sort of a smile. The set-up for *Longlegs* is so *Silence of the Lambs* that it's almost a joke.

There's a tendency in the U.S. to ascribe anything socially undesirable or remotely criminal as "satanic." Did you intend for Longlegs



“THE SET-UP FOR *LONGLEGS* IS SO SILENCE OF THE LAMBS THAT IT’S ALMOST A JOKE.”

— OZ PERKINS

to tap into that anxiety at all?

There are a couple of instances in the movie where it’s incorporated into the fabric of the movie; FBI Agent Browning says, “You know, it’s obvious that he worships the Devil.” But in the United States of America, you’re allowed to do that – which for me is a double-edged, two-[sided] thing. You’re allowed to do whatever you want in America, theoretically, but things that are “evil,” that are non-puritanical, are just bad or foreign or “X” or something like that. Very few people do things in the name of Satan that are bad like that. That’s almost never happening. Every once in a while, [there might] be serial killers like “Yeah, I did this all for Satan,” but it certainly doesn’t compare to the numbers who do bad things for the other side.

Nicolas Cage had a ball with the role; it comes right off the screen. What was it like to work with him on set?

It’s as wonderful and captivating and sort of like a “pinch me” [moment] as you think it might be. Like I said, we’re all indie guys and gals, and people are doing [their] best to catch on. And so, when you end up with a human element in your movie, and it’s someone who’s one of the X number of all-time movie stars – there are very, very few people like that – so to have Nick involved was like Christmas. You open the box and out comes Nicolas Cage, and it doesn’t require assembly and you don’t have to put batter-

ies in; it goes and it’s just going. The first time I met him was at the Polo Lounge at the Beverly Hills Hotel, like I’m [famed early cinema producer] Irving Thalberg. Then you look over and you realize you’re meeting with Nicolas Cage and he’s wearing a leather jacket that’s the size of a fucking gorilla; it’s like five inches thick! And the good news – god, I can’t imagine what it would be like to meet him or meet someone like him without any reason or without any preapproval – was he had already read the script and said he wanted to do it. So at that point, it’s just letting it happen. You know, you go limp. What am I going to do? Tell Nicolas Cage what to do? Like I’m going to talk to him about it, but I’m going to tell him what? We’re going to collaborate, but I’m not going to sit there and be like, “Oh god, I better tell this guy what to do.”

Well, you did. You directed him.

So much, I think, of the job – or at least my approach to the job – is letting everybody else do their job. That’s why I don’t understand a “film by” credit. I don’t understand “This is a blank-blank-person film.” It’s fine, I get it, but we already know that. Like, you wrote, you directed it – good, that’s great. But it’s not yours, it’s everybody’s. It’s such a canned thing to say. Maybe it sounds a little saccharine or silly or something, but it is. I directed [Cage] in that I helped him find the thing that he wanted to find.

Would you say the same was true for Maika Monroe,

who had a really quirky role to play as Lee Harker?

It’s funny in making movies – maybe it’s different at different levels or at studio levels, I don’t know how it goes with other people – but I don’t get a lot of rehearsal time. Maybe I should ask for it, but I don’t get it and it’s always sort of worked out so far. So, what happens with someone like Maika, is I meet her a couple of times, have coffee, and she’s a person, she’s an actress, and she lives in L.A., and she has brown hair, and she’s a human being, and we talk like people. And we sort of talk about the [project] a little bit, but then in keeping with what I’ve been talking about, you trust that the person is going to do something [good] because you know they want it to be good too. That’s the whole thing. It’s not like they’re doing me a favour; Maika Monroe wants to jump off the screen as much as anybody does. So, I’m not going to say to her, “Did you think about your performance, did you have a plan or something?” because she’s going to show up with a really good plan because she wants to knock it out of the park too. And she did a great thing with the part. Without spoiling it for anybody, she’s a character who has no connection to her childhood and so she has no context for even who she is or how to be with people; like all the stuff we learn in childhood, social cues, all that stuff, she just doesn’t have it. And so Maika ended up doing an interpretation of this person. You know, I’ve read a couple of [articles where the writer] feels like maybe she’s on the spectrum or something. I didn’t write that in the words, but she found it in

FILMMAKER OZ PERKINS TALKS ABOUT A
CAREER MAKING HORROR MOVIES, AND SHARES
THOUGHTS ABOUT HIS FATHER, THE LATE, GREAT
ANTHONY PERKINS

SON OF PSYCHO

BY ANDREA SUBISSATI



Hollywood has its share of bloodline dynasties, but no family tree is rooted as deeply in the horror genre as that of Osgood "Oz" Perkins. Named after his paternal grandfather, who starred in numerous Broadway productions and early films of the 1920s and '30s, Oz the second is better known for his more direct ancestor: Anthony Perkins, whose breakout role as Norman Bates in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* secured both actor and director as horror royalty. Of course, *Psycho*'s success had many dimensions – a box office record-breaker, it blasted cinematic conventions (by killing off leading lady Janet Leigh by the end of the first act) as well as industry taboos (by being the first feature film in history to show a toilet bowl). But while Anthony Perkins, who went on to reprise the role of Norman Bates three times over, became a genre icon to horror fans, things appeared differently at home.

“MY DAD’S LIFE IN THE SPOTLIGHT OR LIFE AS AN ACTOR OR LIFE AS AN ARTIST WAS LIKE A LOT OF PEOPLE’S: GOOD AND NOT GOOD, FREEING AND IMPRISONING, JOYFUL AND GRIEF-STRICKEN, HOPEFUL AND TRODDEN.”

– OZ PERKINS

“In the horror genre, I felt like my dad was one of the gods of it,” says Perkins, reflecting on his father’s career. “That was way before I was born. My experience of my dad was not that at all. At that point, he had been relegated to doing bad movies to, you know, keep the lights on, like people do, like dads do. And so, I think my feelings about the horror genre were mixed.”

Indeed, Anthony Perkins’ own relationship with his career in showbiz was similarly complicated. From an edgy Broadway debut as a queer man who is “fixed” by the love of the right woman to several years as a teen pop idol before hitting it big in serious cinema in the late 1950s, Perkins quickly learned that playing pretend was a permanent gig for gay men in that era of Hollywood. Perkins then starred in *Psycho* as a man whose abuse at the hands of his overbearing mother leads him to commit murder in her dress and a



Bloodline: As the son and grandson of genre cinema royalty, Oz Perkins keeps a horror dynasty alive. (From left: Elvis Perkins, Anthony Perkins, Berry Berenson, and Oz, front.)

wig – a brilliant film, but one that nonetheless introduced many Americans to a narrow idea of a criminogenic relationship between childhood abuse and so-called “deviant” sexual proclivities. It couldn’t have been easy for Perkins to be the poster boy of such a problematic depiction of sexual confusion, particularly when he was dealing with his own demons – including a stint of conversion therapy prior to marrying Oz’s mom, model/actress Berry Berenson.

“I lived in a certain way with public parents,” says Perkins. “My father was a gay man, but no one could know that; that was not allowed to be known. [Homophobia] isn’t as crazy as it is [now], but that wasn’t permitted. And so, in my interpretation of it, that sort of reality of his was not part of our lives as a family, and therefore had to be papered over.”

This was perhaps why Perkins senior never pressured Oz to follow in the family footsteps. Still, the young man found his own way to cinema and the opportunities for creative expression therein.

“I never got the man-to-man [talk] from my dad being like, ‘I really hope you do this,’” says Perkins. “If anything, I think it was sort of by omission; it was almost like ‘I kind of hope you don’t do this,’ in a way. My dad’s life in the spot-

light or life as an actor or life as an artist was like a lot of people’s: good and not good, freeing and imprisoning, joyful and grief-stricken, hopeful and trodden.”

But that which is repressed always surfaces one way or another, and Oz admits that the disconnect between *Longlegs* leading lady Lee and her hoarder of an aging mom (played by Alicia Witt) has some autobiographical elements to it.

“Lee’s relationship with her mom is basically that,” he agrees. “For me, anything that I do has to start with that thing that’s real and true for me, as small as it might be, or as opaque or as oblique as it might end up being in the movie. But that’s the truth that I thought was worth making a movie about: the fact that mothers can lie.”

And while all this makes *Longlegs* seem deeply personal to Perkins, the writer/director was fortunate to discover a kindred spirit in his lead monster, another heir to a powerful Hollywood family dynasty, who resonated with the story just as deeply.

“When I first spoke to Nick [Cage], I said, ‘Just so you know, man, I think this movie is about my mom,’” recalls Perkins. “He was like, ‘That’s funny, because I think it’s about my mom.’ And I said, ‘Well, I think we’re gonna do fine, Nick. I think this is all going to work out.’”

"HORROR MOVIES ARE JUST ABOUT PROCESSING DEATH OR THE INEVITABILITY OF THINGS, ALL THAT WE DON'T UNDERSTAND OR KNOW, AND WHAT'S COMING FOR US, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER."

– OZ PERKINS

the words, and it makes a lot of sense.

Your movies are consistently atmospheric and high on dread. Are you still experimenting with techniques for this, or do you feel like you've got it down?

It's not something that I try to do. Maybe that's a weird thing to say, that environment or atmosphere is not intentional, but it's the same as what I was saying before: so many people are involved in creating a minute of film; like so many people are involved in creating the feeling of Lee Harker's childhood bedroom [for example]. I put it on the page that it's her bedroom, and maybe I write some other things about it, but I don't put it together. That's the work of other people and it's the work – the really brilliant work – of cinematographer Andres Arochi and his profound artistry. You find people to work with who have good taste and you're going to get good atmosphere and you're going to get good dread. I don't know. I have good editors and good camera people and good lighting

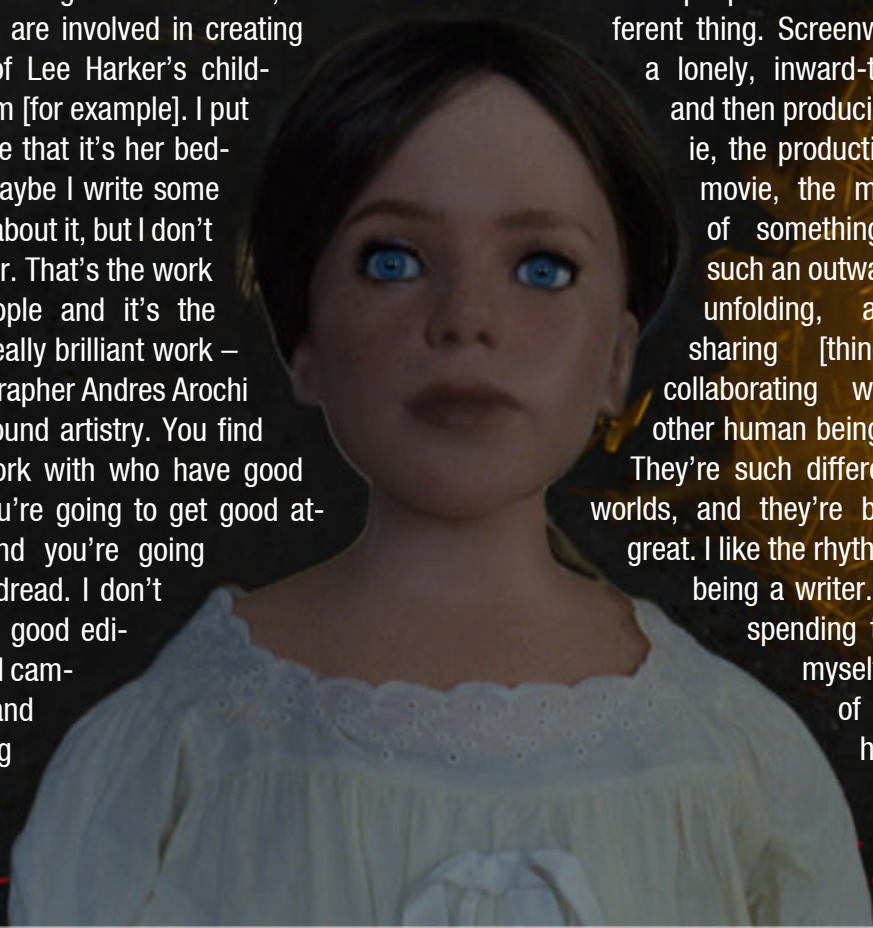
crews; I just say, "Yeah, that looks good" or "No, that doesn't look good."

Between writing and directing, which stage of filmmaking is more exciting for you?

They couldn't be more different. It's really apples and oranges. It's like having two jobs that you really like. They don't really have anything to do with each other in a way, because the script is sort of one phase and then shooting it and talking with other people about it is such a different thing. Screenwriting is such a lonely, inward-turning thing and then producing a movie, the production of a movie, the making of something is such an outward, unfolding, and sharing [thing], collaborating with other human beings. They're such different worlds, and they're both great. I like the rhythm of being a writer. I like spending time by myself and sort of seeing what happens.

Are the supernatural aspects of Longlegs ambiguous to you?

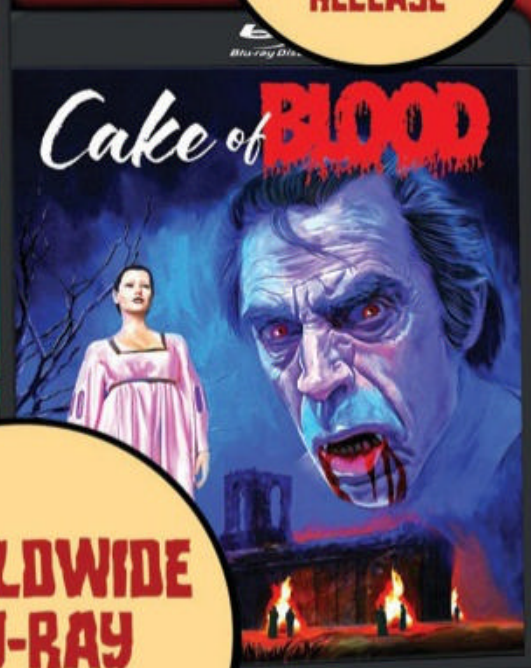
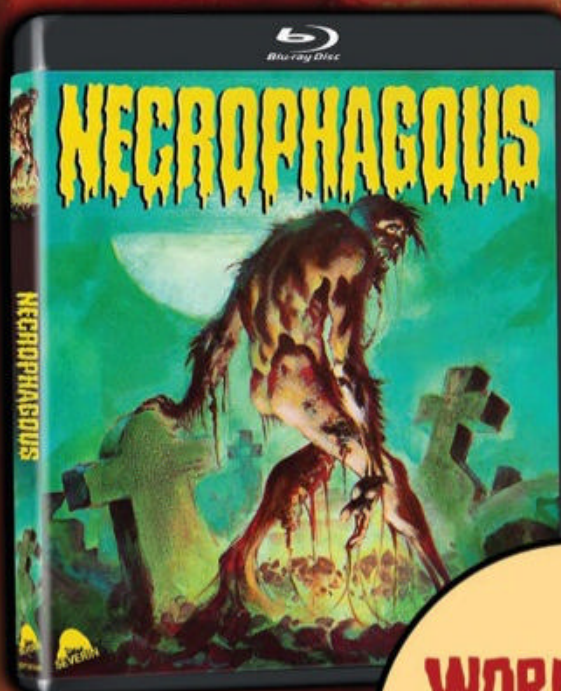
They're not ambiguous [to me]. I know what I think it is, but it's not like I would ever say so for any cute or clever hipster reason. I would never say so because I'm giving this movie away to the people who watch it and not giving it away by ruining it. And so however anybody wants to experience it, they should dig it. It's just a story. 🍷



"SEVERIN HAS A FIXATION ON REVIVING - SOMETIMES RESUSCITATING -
EVERYTHING RARE AND ARCAINE IN EURO-HORROR."

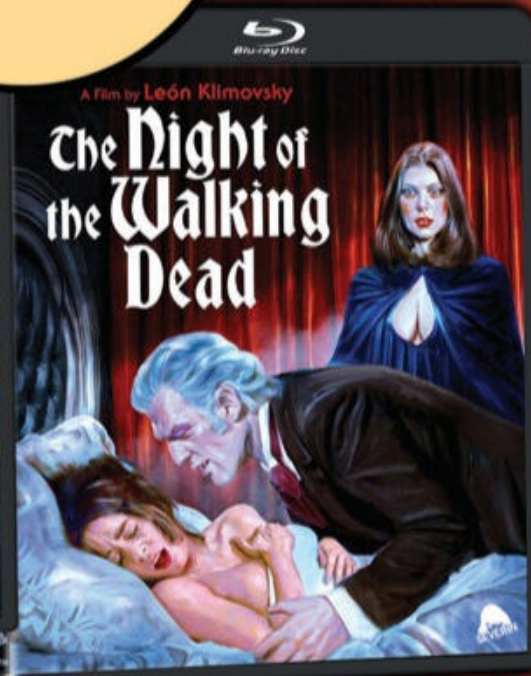
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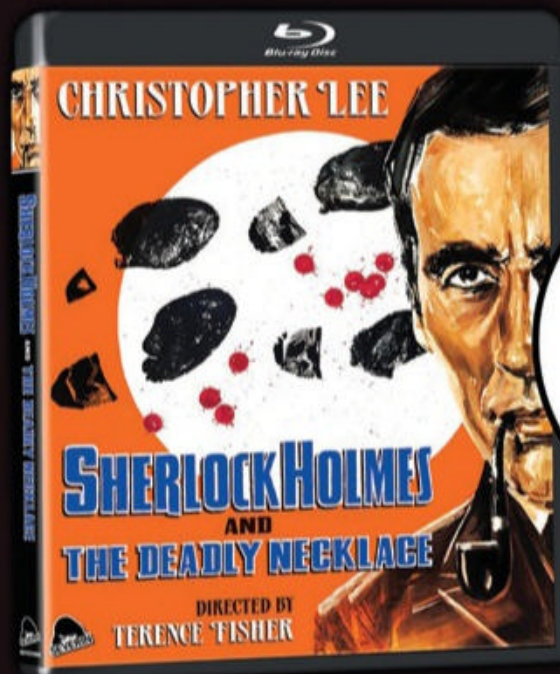
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I SPIT ON YOUR CELLULOID, AN EXHAUSTIVELY
RESEARCHED NEW BOOK FROM ETHERIA FILM FESTIVAL
CO-FOUNDER **HEIDI HONEYCUTT**, PROVES THAT HORROR
HAS ALWAYS RUN RED WITH THE FEMININE GAZE

DAWN OF THE WOMEN



BY DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

The female half of the human race has been directing horror since the birth of cinema, but their contributions have never been properly and systematically valued — until now. Heidi Honeycutt's *I Spit on Your Celluloid: The History of Women Directing Horror Movies*, coming this August from Headpress, is a pioneering overview of the subject that aims to right that wrong and redress the balance once and for all.

This huge volume is not merely a history of women directors in horror, it also provides key context by way of conveying the changing nature of the genre throughout the 20th century thanks to the women's rights and civil rights movements, new distribution technologies, the destruction of the classic studio system, the rise of digital cameras and social media, as well as modern ideas of gender and racial equality, LGBTQ acceptance, and so much more. The book's staggering size (over 450 illustrated pages in large format) is augmented by the fact that the author conducted hundreds of interviews and watched thousands of films in order to make what cult filmmaker Stephanie Rothman (*The Velvet Vampire*, 1971) labelled "a book that needed to be written." And who could argue with Joe Dante? In his words: "At long last, a criminally-neglected aspect of film history is illuminated. Honeycutt knows her stuff, and the wealth of information is fascinating. This is a major work."

No debutante to the scene, Heidi Honeycutt is a film festival programmer, film journalist, and film historian who specializes in horror movies. She co-founded the Etheria Film Festival, a prestigious showcase of new horror, sci-fi, fantasy, action, and thriller films directed by women. She has contributed to various genre books and magazines, including *Famous Monsters of Film-land*, *Fangoria*, *MovieMaker Magazine*, *Delirium* and, yes, *Rue Morgue*. Her experience with the genre obviously runs deep, but a big task like *I Spit on Your Celluloid* also required stupendous amounts of dedication and perseverance.

"The biggest challenge in writing a first-of-its-kind book is that there isn't any one place to do all the research needed," she explains. "The information was scattered in different places: some of it in books dedicated to horror as a whole, or in a series of interviews with many different directors, or a book dedicated to a single film in entirety; some of the information was only available by speaking to people who studied one specific film or had very specific knowledge of one filmmaker; some information was preserved by archivists of silent era films, or specialists studying one specific country's history of cinema; some of the information was known only to professors or academics who were currently researching a specific film or filmmaker, or to a family member of the filmmaker."

A few books partially paved her way; she cites *House of Psychotic Women* (2012) by Kier-La Janisse, dealing with "female neurosis in horror



Thicker Than Water: Stephanie Rothman's *Carmilla*-esque 1971 feature *The Velvet Vampire* is sexy, slick, and steeped in vivid reds.

and exploitation films," and two recent academic collections: *Women Make Horror: Filmmaking, Feminism, Genre* (2020), edited by Alison Peirse, and *Bloody Women: Women Directors of Horror* (2022), edited by Victoria McCollum and Aislinn Clarke. However, more helpful, by Honeycutt's own admission, were obscure sources, like the 2005 documentary *Taiwan Black Movies*.

"Women direct horror differently than men. I also think they can direct horror that is indistinguishable from the horror directed by men."

— HEIDI HONEYCUTT, AUTHOR AND FILM HISTORIAN

"It focuses on the trend of extremely violent low-budget films made in the country between 1979 and 1983, and is one of the only sources of detailed making-of information about director Chia-Yun Yang's films *Lady Avenger* (1981) and *Exposed to Danger* (1982). *Lady Avenger* was the first woman-directed rape/revenge film."

Honeycutt also contacted people personally and asked for direct interviews when she could — which wasn't always possible, as some are deceased, and there were those who didn't wish to discuss their films. Obviously, it was easier finding out about movies from the past few decades, but quite a different matter when it came to rare films and barely known female directors

from the silent era and the classical period. Nevertheless, Honeycutt persisted.

"A great source of information," she says, "are the saved and archived issues of *The Moving Picture World*, a printed magazine which ran from 1907 to 1927 that detailed film releases in the silent era. It featured reviews of films, interviews, advertisements, and synopses of new releases at the time, many of which are now lost. Without the preserved issues of *Moving Picture World*, and a few other printed serials of the time, like *Motion Picture Herald*, most of the information they contain would be irretrievably lost."

Apart from the obscure fare on display, what distinguishes *I Spit on Your Celluloid* is that it provides a detailed, chronological overview of all the horror films made by women, from Alice Guy-Blaché, the first woman to direct a film, all the way to today's rising stars. Its vast scope encompasses short films, anthologies, documentaries, animated horror, horror pornography, pink films, and experimental horror; the she-makers of "elevated" and "exploitation" horror are united between these covers. The strippers, the sequels, drive-in fodder, art films, feminist manifestos, mindless and mindful slashers, nudie flicks, horror classics, theatrical and mainstream horror together with digital flicks, short and experimental titles from the deepest underground — none have escaped Honeycutt's meticulous research, not even the hardest-to-find female-directed horrors from Asia and South America.

"I found that there are a lot of people who study the cinema of specific nations and specific time periods in those nations with the same obsessive nature that I exhibit when I research women horror movie directors," she says, "and they often unveil information about the women directors that worked in those niche eras. For instance, the blog *Pelikula*, *ATBP* is dedicated to cinema from the Philippines and includes



rare scans of newspaper articles and advertisements from 1919 through 2019. Another amazing source of information is student film masters and PhD theses about specific filmmakers as well as ongoing research from professors. It would take a lifetime to do a deep-dive in-person study of each of these films from scratch and visit the different cinematheques and preservation organizations around the world that house the only copies of their work.”

One question which naturally arises when talking about women directors of horror is whether there is a quality or aspect of style or content which is unique to that group, or at least more common to female directors. Who better to ask than Honeycutt?

“The protagonists of horror movies directed by women are more likely to be women, than when men make the film,” she answers. “People tell the stories that they know, and inevitably women’s life experiences will be different than men’s, and so the stories they tell may be different. Women may tell stories about women’s loneliness, or motherhood fears, or periods, or sexuality – but men have also



told those stories about women in horror movies, so it isn’t only women directors that are sensitive to women’s experiences as potential horror stories. *Ginger Snaps*, *May*, *Rebecca*, *Cat People*, and *Rosemary’s Baby* are horror films about women that are directed by men. But *Slumber Party Massacre*, *The Velvet Vampire*, *Prevenge*, *The Mafu Cage*, *The Babadook*, *Lyle*, and *Jennifer’s Body*, all films about women’s experiences of horror, are all directed by women. I think we can see what we want to see when we look for it. I think yes, women direct horror differently than men. I also think they can direct horror that is indistinguishable from the horror directed by men.”

Honeycutt also points out that her painstaking research uncovered female authors and their films which deserve much greater praise and higher position in the horror pantheon.

“So many silent film directors who are regarded as ‘feminist pioneers’ actually made horror movies and many horror fans don’t know about them or



BEST KNOWN FOR DIRECTING STEPHEN KING'S FAVOURITE
CINEMATIC ADAPTATION OF HIS WORK, **MARY LAMBERT**
REFLECTS ON A CAREER OF BEATING THE ODDS

THE FIRST LADY OF HORROR CINEMA

BY DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

Mary Lambert's immensely popular Stephen King adaptation *Pet Sematary* (1989) was the first large studio-produced horror film directed by a woman and remains a title folks tend to trot out when arguing that the director's chair isn't as gender-exclusive a throne as it once was. But, as Heidi Honeycutt reminds us in *I Spit on Your Celluloid: The History of Women Directing Horror Movies*, that gig "broke the mould" in the industry as "women were not usually offered studio directing jobs, period." That great commercial hit and fan favourite was followed by many other genre offerings for Lambert, including *Pet Sematary II* (1992), *The In Crowd* (2000), and *Urban Legends: Bloody Mary* (2005) among others. Seeing as Lambert also wrote the foreword to Honeycutt's book, it was as good a reason as any to catch up.

Did you pick horror or did horror pick you? In other words, did you have any special affinity for the genre before the script for *Pet Sematary* landed in your hands?

When I was a little girl, I was obsessed with fairy tales as they were written down from the Middle Ages, when most of them originated. As I'm sure you know, many of them are quite hor-

rific cautionary tales designed to scare children into obeying the rules of society. I have never wavered in my fascination for this type of allegorical fantastical storytelling, especially when it depicts supernatural events. Fantasy (and horror) help me understand and tolerate the boredom and sadness that sometime dominate the reality of existence.

You were handpicked by Stephen King to direct *Pet Sematary*. Still, how much protection and safety did that actually bring in the context of the fact that you were the first woman director ever to be given a big-budget studio horror film?

Stephen was unbelievably supportive of me. He and I had the same goal of protecting the essence of his story from unreasonable meddling from outside sources.

How have the times changed in recent years for female directors of horror, especially regarding their likelihood to get to work in the business? What work remains to be done in that area?

There are many more female directors now than when I began my career – there were virtual-

ly no other female directors then, especially in the horror genre. Horror has always been a way for young filmmakers to enter the business of filmmaking with a low-budget movie. Horror is more respectable now and young women see it as a valuable way to express themselves. The truth is that most of the opportunities for women remain low-budget projects, while the big Hollywood movies go to male directors. The ascendance of cable and limited series on streaming platforms is changing that and there are a lot of exciting female directors who are focusing on that area for their careers.

Do you have any passion project in the horror genre that you have written already and would love to work on soon?

Yes. I have just finished writing a script loosely based on Oscar Wilde's "The Canterville Ghost." It explores the idea that we carry, in our DNA, the cellular trauma of our ancestors. I am hopeful that I will be able to set this up in the near future. 🐾



consider them horror!” she exclaims. “And while Lois Weber and Alice Guy Blaché did direct films about marriage and abortion and women’s poverty and motherhood, they also directed home-invasion slashers (Weber’s *Suspense*, 1913) and literary horror adaptations (Guy-Blaché’s *The Pit and the Pendulum*, 1913). Other women directors from that era, like Austrian filmmaker Luise Fleck, directed mostly horror, fantasy, and adventure films, and for some reason I never see them mentioned by horror fans anywhere. Fleck was the first woman to direct a feature-length horror film, *Trilby* (1912), and her 1919 movie *Die Ahnfrau* is a fun Gothic ghost story about a haunted castle.”

Clearly, contributions from women directors have been evenly spread throughout horror cinema’s history, but that soup is certainly much thicker in recent years. Honeycutt contends that we are in a period of “horror renaissance” now, and that the female directors brought a lot to its blood-spattered table.

“I do think that, right now, more women directors than ever before are making horror movies, and many of them are pushing boundaries and exploring old and new themes, and many more are working directly for studios. Many very recent studio remakes, prequels, and pre-makes were directed by women, including *The First Omen* (2024), *Black Christmas* (2019), *The Craft: Legacy* (2020), *The Slumber Party Massacre* (2021), and *Candyman* (2021). That’s new — women usually aren’t hired for a string of big films like that, but I think since 2017 (when the #metoo movement began), studios want to specifically hire women to ensure audiences that women-centric stories are told ‘in a woman-y way,’ whatever that means. I don’t think having a woman director on these remakes necessarily improves the quality of the film in the eyes of women audience members, but the studios think it does, so they offer many women directors new opportunities to work in an industry that had previously been more closed to them. I also think there are more women showrunners on big genre TV series now, which seems to increase the likelihood of women being hired in the writing room and as directors.”

Still, the area where women directors seem to be bringing their A-game to the horror table is in independent films, with especially intriguing and fresh perspective brought by queer women. However, showcasing queer filmmakers is not always easy, since, as Honeycutt



Deep Cuts: *I Spit on Your Celluloid* contains a treasure trove of lesser-known, lady-led fright fare, such as (from top) *Die Ahnfrau* (1919), *The Mafu Cage* (1978), and *Trilby* (1915).

agrees, whether a woman director is a lesbian or not is not always public knowledge.

“Some women directors have openly declared their films to have been influenced by their queer experience,” she says, “such as Sharon Ferranti’s slasher feature *Make a Wish* (2002), which is about lesbians on a lesbian camping trip being hunted down by a lesbian slasher. There are several short horror films directed by women that make an analogy between being a trans man or queer woman and transforming into a monster/creature that feels new and uncomfortable or embarrassing. Many horror films, both with lesbian plotlines and directors and without them, are about women’s sexuality, both cis and queer, being akin to being, in particular, a werewolf, such as Jackie Garry’s *The Curse* (1999), Amy Lynn Best’s *Weregrl* (2002), Lola Rocknrolla’s short *I Was a Trannie Werewolf* (2009), and Sydne Horton’s *Meta* (2020).”

In any case, the greater inclusiv-

ity in recent years, especially regarding female directors, doesn’t mean that there is no more room for change. As far as areas for improvement, Honeycutt pinpoints the monopoly on major money and distribution, held by just a few companies, which suppress smaller companies and filmmakers.

“When these big entertainment conglomerates lose their near-total stranglehold on the film industry, independent filmmaking and mid-level films will boom, because the money to fund films will be more adequately distributed,” she says. “Being a woman director isn’t its own separate category of personhood beholden to different rules than everyone else in the film industry. Rising tides float all boats, and I think ultimately that someone’s gender shouldn’t even come into discussion when studios decide to hire a director. I’m not saying that sexism doesn’t exist or that women have equal chances of being hired for all jobs they compete with men for, but what I am saying is that when people in the film industry are treated better, offered new opportunities, and are allowed to make more daring and innovative choices, inevitably the discrimination that women face as directors will also be eroded.” 🧛‍♀️



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A promotional graphic for 'HorrorBabble' and 'The Faculty of Horror'. On the left is a stylized illustration of a woman's face with glowing yellow eyes and a wide, toothy grin, with a brain visible inside her head emitting white light rays. The background is a dark, textured blue-grey. Text on the right includes 'FEED YOUR BRAIN AT RUE-MORGUE.COM', 'with HORRORBABBLE' (in a red, splattered font with a skull icon), 'AUDIO TALES OF TERROR NEW READING EVERY WEDNESDAY!', 'and THE FACULTY OF HORROR' (in a green, stylized font with a radio icon), and 'CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY HORROR FILM DISCUSSIONS THAT WILL HAUNT THE LIBRARIES OF YOUR MIND. NEW SHOW EVERY MONTH!'.

TILMAN SINGER'S LONG-AWAITED FOLLOW-UP TO 2018'S *LUZ* IS ANOTHER EURO-STEEPED EXPERIMENT IN GONZO FILMMAKING

CALL OF CUCKOO

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

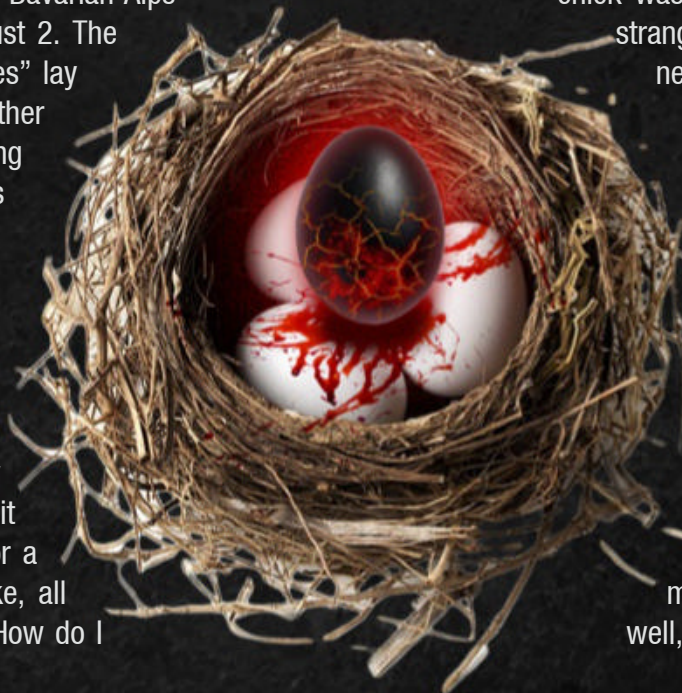
The cuckoo bird may best be known to some people as the ornamental centerpiece of clocks manufactured in Germany and elsewhere in Europe for centuries. But it's the surprisingly insidious nature of certain species of cuckoo that helped inspire the film that bears their name, set in the Bavarian Alps and coming from Neon on August 2. The females of these "brood parasites" lay a single egg in the nest of another bird; after it hatches, the fledgling then disposes of the other chicks so that it can become the sole recipient of the host parents' attention.

"I was finishing up my previous movie *Luz*," *Cuckoo* writer/director Tilman Singer recalls, "and I saw a BBC documentary about the cuckoo bird and how it breeds. It wouldn't let me go for a couple of weeks, until I was like, all right, what can I do with this? How do I

project this idea onto humans?

"I watched these tiny host parent birds raising a cuckoo chick that was not their own," he continues, "and there was this moment when the host parents were balancing on the cuckoo chick's back in order to feed it, because the chick was bigger than they were. That had a strange tragedy to it, but also a hopefulness, because they would just keep on going and accepting this situation. So starting from there, I saw similarities to stories of my own and of people I know, having to do with accepting what's going on in your family."

How that ornithological phenomenon relates to what happens in *Cuckoo* is best left for viewers to tease out when they see it — and there's a *lot* happening in this movie. Indeed, the other meaning of "cuckoo" applies here as well, as Singer's sophomore feature is



one of the more bonkers entries on the recent genre scene. *Euphoria*'s Hunter Schafer stars as teenaged Gretchen, who reluctantly joins her father Luis (Marton Csokas), stepmother Beth (Jessica Henwick), and younger stepsister Alma (Mila Lieu) in relocating to the Alps. Luis and Beth are redesigning a local resort hotel for Herr König (Dan Stevens), whose weird demeanour (and mystifying accent) signposts more oddities to come. Already alienated from her family in typical tortured-teen fashion, Gretchen is pursued and attacked by a mysterious, screaming woman, the mute Alma is beset by traumatic seizures, and the atmosphere in and around the hotel goes from strange and uncomfortable to much, much worse.

Like Singer's celebrated *Luz*, *Cuckoo* is suffused in a surreal, disconcerting atmosphere enhanced by the fact that, thanks to the filming style and choice of props, it's hard to put your finger on exactly when the movie takes place. This was a carefully calibrated choice on the part of Singer and his returning team, including cinematographer Paul Faltz, production designer Dario Mendez Acosta, and composer Simon Waskow.

"We really like a little bit of disorientation in terms of when a story's set," Singer notes. "It has to make sense for the characters and for plot, but other than that, I enjoy creating a sort of parallel universe that we understand, but doesn't quite function the way our world does. In both *Cuckoo* and *Luz*, the fairy-tale vibes of the stories help make that possible. *Luz*, however, was loosely based on a story from my wife's childhood in Colombia, and that would have happened in the early '90s, so we just set it then.

"But for *Cuckoo*, we didn't think we had to pretend the story was set in the past, or a parallel-universe past. We felt the characters could have cellphones and other modern technology, and we could still do that layering of fashion styles and interior designs from other eras as well, and we tried to have it all make sense. It's cut out of the movie, and I don't want to give away too much, but the reason [certain characters] use older technology is so they can record on analog media they can easily destroy, that cannot be replicated just like that. So everything sort of has a reason, and I hope [audiences] can feel that."

Adding to the sense of tactile reality amidst the fanciful goings-on is Singer's choice to once again shoot on film, moving up from *Luz*'s 16mm to 35mm. This approach, he says, is less an artistic decision than simply how he prefers to work, challenges and all.

"I've never shot a scripted movie digitally," he explains. "I'm so used to the workflow, which is precisely what I love about shooting on film. It's cumbersome, it makes you plan, it makes you truly understand what you want to do and leads you to have greater discipline. You can't go for lots of coverage, just generating footage, you

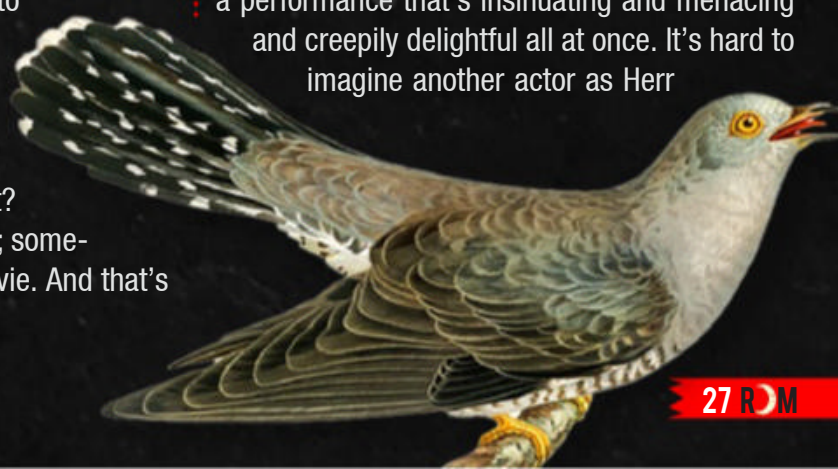


Sitting Duck: Trapped in a strange country under stranger circumstances, Gretchen (Hunter Schafer) has no idea what she's up against.

can't shoot rehearsals or do more than three or four takes, because it's expensive. And on top of that, 35mm cameras are extremely heavy, so you need a couple of people to move them.

"I actually think these hurdles are good, because they make it so you have to plan more; it's not a matter of circumstance. And then with the happy accidents that occur, you have to live with them, because you only have so many takes, right? You can't just cut around anything; sometimes things have to be in the movie. And that's a beautiful process."

It also helps to have a cast that's right on your unique and weird wavelength, and can fully inhabit their roles. Singer praises Schafer for her relaxed vulnerability as troubled teen Gretchen, and then there's Stevens, stealing *Cuckoo* with a performance that's insinuating and menacing and creepily delightful all at once. It's hard to imagine another actor as Herr



"I'VE NEVER SHOT A SCRIPTED MOVIE DIGITALLY. I'M SO USED TO THE WORKFLOW, WHICH IS PRECISELY WHAT I LOVE ABOUT SHOOTING ON FILM."

– DIRECTOR TILMAN SINGER

König – which makes it a surprise when Stevens reveals that the part was originally to be played by John Malkovich, until the *Cuckoo* shoot got pushed forward due to COVID concerns.

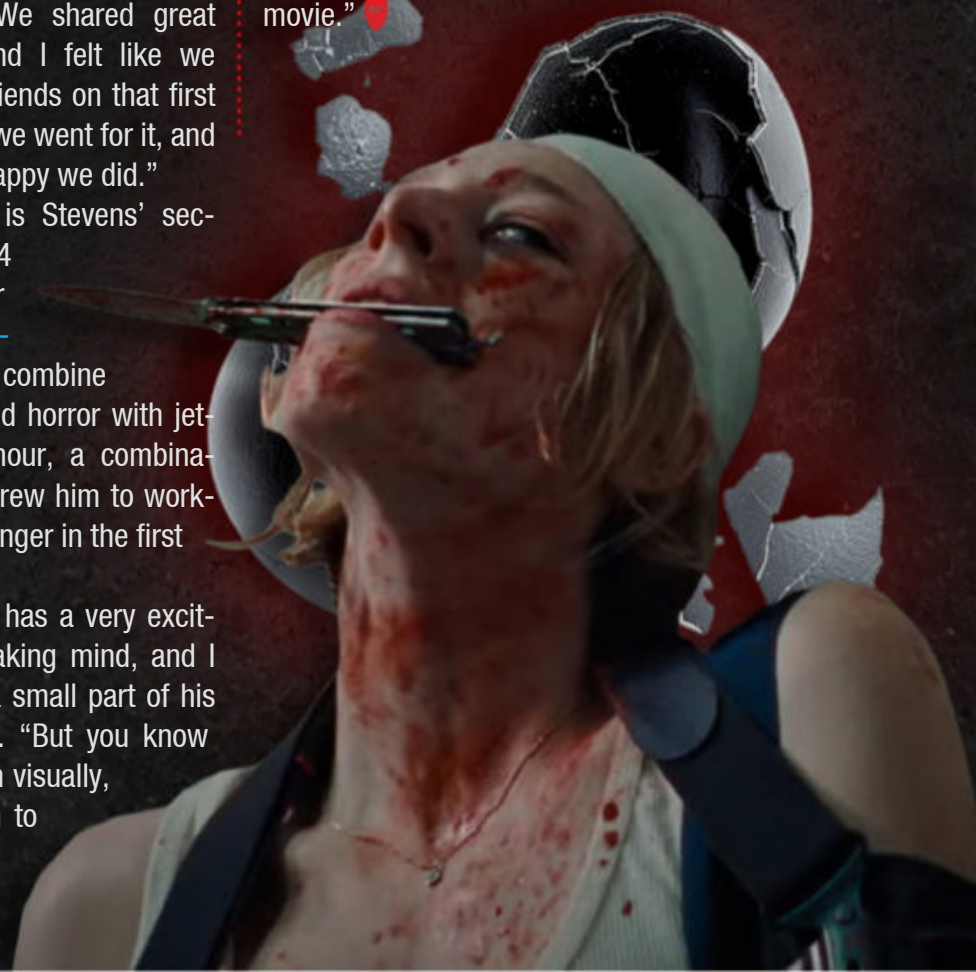
"Weeks before production, Malkovich discovered that he was committed to start doing a play, and he couldn't do the film," Stevens explains, "so they cast their net a little wider; the argument was whether that role needed to be filled by someone older, and I didn't think it needed to be. I chatted with Tilman on Zoom, and we began the meeting in German, since I speak it, and he was blown away by that. He really liked the idea of having a German-speaker in that role, and we started talking about German men we have known. There's a particular kind of German character that appealed to us, and made us laugh, and that's a great place to start – with a shared sense of humour about something."

"Dan made a very good case for Herr König not needing to be in his sixties," adds Singer. "He should be in his sixties symbolically, metaphorically, but he didn't actually have to be that age. And Dan told me about a friend of his, a German who is wealthy but crazy esoteric. We shared great laughs, and I felt like we became friends on that first Zoom, so we went for it, and I'm very happy we did."

Cuckoo is Stevens' second 2024 film (after April's *Abigail*) to combine full-blooded horror with jet-black humour, a combination that drew him to working with Singer in the first place.

"Tilman has a very exciting filmmaking mind, and I was just a small part of his crazy world," the actor says. "But you know you're in good hands with him visually, which gives you the freedom to

relax into the role and potentially do something very special. The comedy in *Cuckoo* comes from a weirder place than in *Abigail*, but nevertheless, there were subtle ways we tried to make each other laugh, and particularly tried to make Tilman laugh. And if I could make Tilman laugh, it was a better bet that it would make it into the movie."





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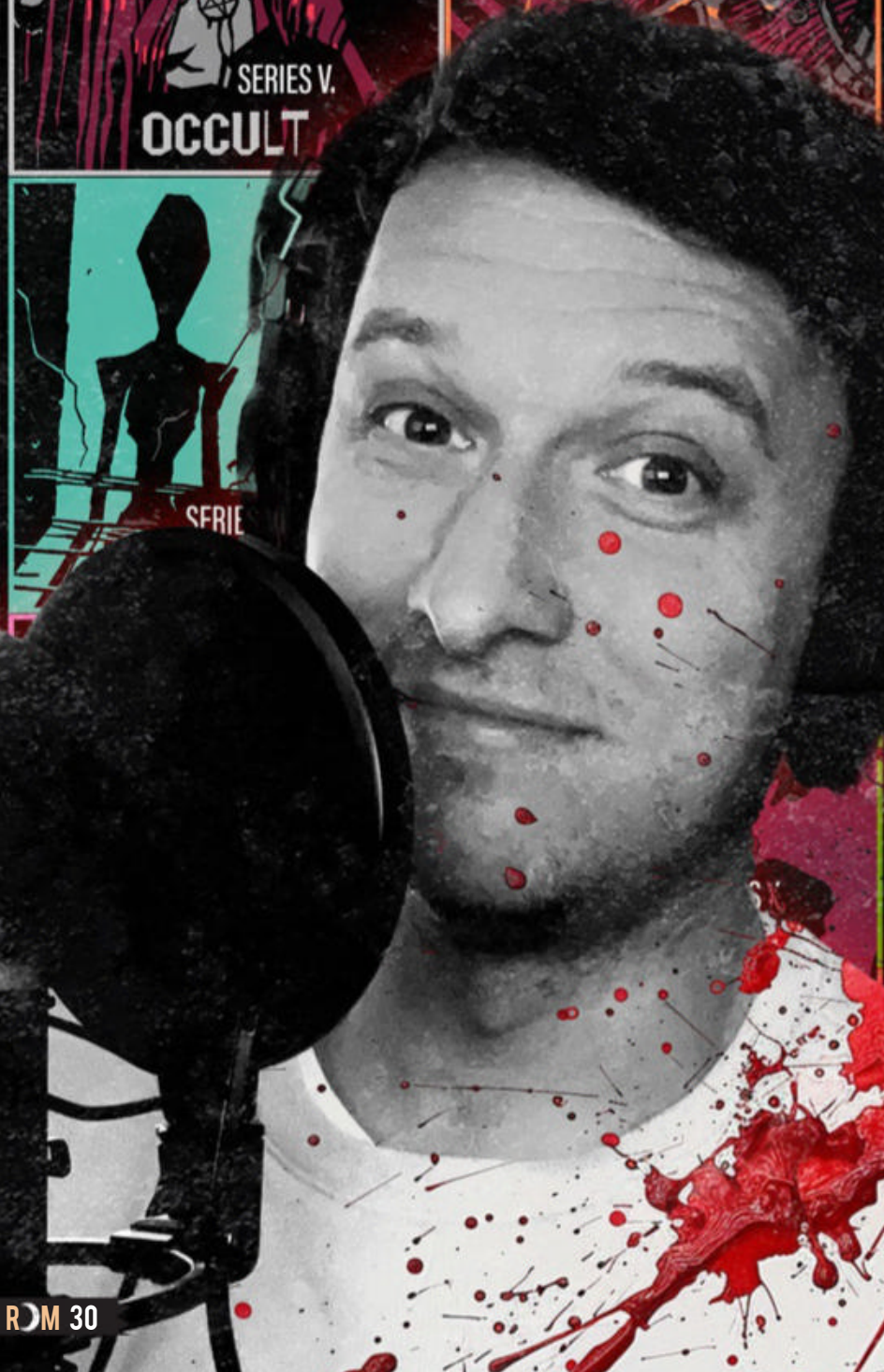
UNNATURAL SELECTION

BY JESSICA BUCK

Part of the reason podcasting has become so popular in recent years is that it's still a platform untouched by the conventional broadcast gatekeepers, which allows creators to run wild with niche interests. Anyone can create a show about anything, and yet, only a few podcasters have been able to transition their programs into a commodity that stretches beyond the RSS airwaves. This is what sets Mike Muncer and his weekly genre history show, *The Evolution of Horror*, apart from the rest: while the podcast remains largely a one-man affair, it has bloomed into a powerhouse brand since its inception only seven years ago, including a new card game designed to allow the show's fans to assemble their own horror movie narrative with the genre's most enduring tropes and subgenres.

A combined effort from Muncer, his gamer friend Alex Ayling, and artist Mike Lee-Graham (who also provides artwork for the podcast), *Final Cut* is comprised of 96 beautifully designed cards, broken up into Victim, Killer, Setting, and Item categories. All of the stereotypical killers are there (from the "cursed schoolgirl" to the "masked madman") along with oddball outliers like "swarm of insects" and "insane podcast host." Muncer and company envisioned an easy and accessible game that can be played anywhere in as little as twenty minutes, with no small game pieces to go missing or get stepped on. And while the game doesn't require a deep knowledge of horror, extra points are awarded to those who can collect cards that belong to the same film subgenre. Bolstered by *The Evolution of Horror*'s many world-wide fans, *Final Cut* reached its Kickstarter funding goal in just 90 minutes, and Muncer plans to have it available for sale to non-backers this summer.

"There's almost like a *Cards Against Humanity* element to it, where [players] can talk through what [their] film is about," Muncer tells *Rue Morgue*. "You're like, 'okay, so it's set in a high



school and it's about a werewolf with a mystical puzzle box. And people can vote on who's got the best film out of the combination of cards and all these kinds of things. So there are loads of different variations on what you can do with the game."

For those acquainted with the podcast, *Final Cut* feels like the natural trajectory for *The Evolution of Horror*, where seasons of the show are divided by subgenre, and the hosts dive deep into the subject and its corresponding tropes, quirks, and clichés. Running over an hour per weekly episode, guests have included the likes of critic Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, filmmaker Axelle Carolyn, and author Tananarive Due. Slashers, creature features, home invasion, vampires, aliens, zombies, folk horror, and ghosts are just a few of the seasons available to listen to now, and Muncer isn't worried about running out of material.

"I haven't done any classic monster movies yet; so like, *Frankenstein* and werewolves and the Mummy," he says. "I've never done anthology movies, like *Creepshow* and *V/H/S*... There's actually still loads of stuff that I haven't covered yet — which is good, because I kind of want the podcast to go on!"

"THERE'S A CARDS AGAINST HUMANITY ELEMENT TO IT, WHERE [PLAYERS] CAN TALK THROUGH WHAT [THEIR] FILM IS ABOUT."

**- FINAL CUT CREATOR
MIKE MUNCE**

While most genre podcasts are a decidedly D.I.Y. affair, *TEoH*'s production quality is as slick as its robust merch store. Having worked in UK television, including producing credits on the BBC's *The Film Programme* and *Inside Cinema* series of video essays, Muncer had access to all the tools of the trade when he launched the show in 2017.

"I had experience with producing and editing and all of that stuff, so I guess I had a head start in that regard," says Muncer, adding that listeners are often surprised to learn how small the show's production team really is.

"I'd never been in front of the camera, in front of the mic, at all, but I just thought I'll give it a go.

The nicest compliments I receive are when people assume that it's actually a BBC-made podcast or something. It's just



A Stacked Deck: *The Evolution of Horror* podcast's new *Final Cut* card game tasks players with combining subgenres, stereotypes, and tropes toward creating an original horror movie plot.

me in my bedroom."

Muncer's leap into full-time podcasting happened right before the COVID-19 pandemic shut the world down — a fact that turned out to be a blessing in spite of the economic uncertainty of the time. In addition to a larger segment of the population having the time to listen, the lockdown forced a lot of industries to streamline their processes and get comfortable doing things remotely. Muncer was no exception.

"Initially, pre-COVID, I only wanted to record with people in person, so I could use my own microphones and control the quality of the audio," he explains. "This meant I had a fairly restrictive pool of guests, who were all London-based and usually people working in similar industries to me. By the time COVID hit in 2020, I had to find new ways to record podcasts with people, and suddenly this widened my pool of guests to anyone in the world. So I would say the biggest evolution has been the guests and different diverse voices I've had on the pod."

Muncer adds that putting out a well-researched and high-quality show once a week is often more than a full-time job in terms of hours spent editing, researching, and promoting.

"I will spend a few months just planning the episodes and the schedule and booking in guests," he says. "And then once it's all planned and I've booked everyone in, then I start recording them and putting them out. And so usually each episode takes me probably about a week in total."

Any creator, no matter how good their content and how cheaply they're able to produce their show, needs to keep a roof over their head. And

while subscription-based models and Square-space ads have provided the biggest podcast creators some tools toward monetization, Muncer acknowledges that a successful brand needs to keep its listenership happy... and heard.

"I rely entirely on listener contributions on Patreon rather than sponsors or ads" he says, "so for me, the pressure is on to keep listeners happy and not losing them! This can be scary, but I think it's also what motivates me to keep it as consistent and fresh as possible. I engage with my Patreon subscribers a lot, ask them what sort of content they'd like to hear, it's more of an open dialogue, so it's really all about keeping them happy."

Evolution of Horror fans are happier than ever this summer, with the news of Muncer's expansion of the brand into a growing network of podcasts — starting with *The Detective and the Log Lady*, a weekly show devoted to the *Twin Peaks* universe, co-hosted by Muncer and *Rue Morgue*'s own Stacie Ponder. The future of podcasting may be uncertain, but between his close collaboration with his supporters and a seemingly endless supply of optimism and inspiration, Muncer's plan for *The Evolution of Horror* is, fittingly, to evolve.

"By expanding *TEoH* into a network of podcasts, the aim is to open it up to a wider audience," he says. "And David Lynch's work, while 'horror adjacent,' has always had an appeal beyond just genre stuff. *Twin Peaks* is that perfect blend of cult, genre storytelling, art house, and mainstream soap opera. Even my horror-hating mom was addicted to that show in the '90s; I'll finally have a podcast my mom will enjoy listening to!"



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ADAMS FAMILY VALUES

HELL HOLE

Starring Toby Poser, John Adams and Olivera Peruničić
Directed by John Adams and Toby Poser
Written by Lulu Adams, John Adams and Toby Poser
Shudder

After scoring a handful of festival circuit hits with *Hellbender* (2021) and *Where the Devil Roams* (2023) indie real-life family the Adamses return to expand their borders with the Serbian/American creature feature *Hell Hole*. While this is not exactly genre-changing, world-shaking stuff, it's hard not to root for an actual mom-and-pop production where everyone's good-time vibes drip right off the screen. It's a nice reminder amid all the films dealing with guilt and trauma and such that sometimes horror movies can just be, you know, fun.

At a disused coal mine in the middle of Serbian nowhere, a group of roughnecks led by American interests drill in search of potential fracking sites, much to the consternation of local conservationists searching the area for rare wildlife. Rather than natural gas or elusive rabbits, they unearth a cocooned 19th-century Frenchman (it'll make sense when



you see it, honest) who's hosting a hidden – and many-tentacled – passenger. The creature busts out, body-hops, and... well, you know how these things go.

The direction from husband-and-wife duo Toby Poser and John Adams isn't particularly compelling; rather, it's mostly scenes of folks standing in a small group talking about stuff. Then we might get a scene where stuff happens, punctuated by a loud heavy metal score (provided by Adams) injecting an energy that often feels at odds with the action. Luckily for all of us, the characters are mostly charming and there's enough humour to make all the standing around and talking enjoyable to watch. There's even a dash of sexual politics at play in the relationships and the film's conceit to make it a little spicy.

Look, it's just a fact that every parasitic, body-jumping monster flick made since 1982 stands in the shadow of John Carpenter's *The Thing*. While *Hell Hole* certainly doesn't have the budget to give us anything as memorable as a dog turning into alien spaghetti, people do explode into bloody goo from time to time and, as far as I'm concerned, that's worth the price of admission.

STACIE PONDER

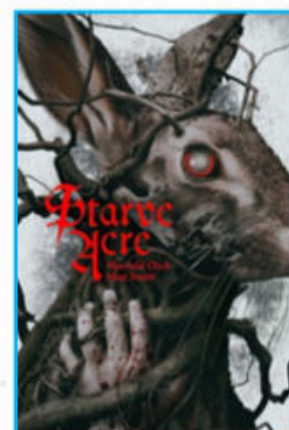
CREEPY AS FOLK

STARVE ACRE

Starring Matt Smith, Morfydd Clark and Erin Richards
Written and directed by Daniel Kokotajlo
Brainstorm Media

The British folk horror revival that now dates back over a decade continues in fine form with *Starve Acre*. Adapting Andrew Michael Hurley's award-winning 2019 novel, writer/director Daniel Kokotajlo follows up his acclaimed religious drama *Apostasy* with a moody and deeply felt study of darker devotions.

Set in an unspecified (but clearly bygone) decade in very rural countryside, *Starve Acre* finds Richard (Matt Smith) and Jules (*Saint Maud*'s Morfydd Clark) concerned over the behaviour of their young son Owen (Arthur Shaw). The boy's actions go from odd to violent, and he claims to be hearing "whistling" from Jack Grey, a creature of local folklore – one that Richard's father once investigated on this same land. This leads to tragedy befalling the couple, and as Jules recedes into a deep depression, Richard responds by throwing himself into an excavation project on the property. What he un-



earths will unleash ancient forces that threaten to overwhelm the couple's psyche and lives.

Right from the start, there's a sense of nature itself as a menacing entity, as Kokotajlo drenches his film in eerie rustic atmosphere. This is one spookily well-crafted production, as cinematographer Adam Scarth, production designer Francesca Massariol, composer Matthew Herbert et al. submerge us in an austere environment touched by unease. For a while, though, the emphasis is on familial trauma more than outright horror, and Smith and Clark both give understated yet powerful performances. The folklore pervading the environment and creeping into Richard and Jules' lives becomes a tangible presence – and it does so incrementally. Kokotajlo handles the encroachment of the occult in a matter-of-fact manner that, by the end, makes the scary part of the story feel like it snuck up on you. That final act, which includes a true WTF-did-I-just-see? moment, packs a chill that's as quiet yet potent as everything else about *Starve Acre*.

MICHAEL GINGOLD

TWIN CHAGRIN

ODDITY

Starring Carolyn Bracken, Gwilym Lee and Caroline Menton
Written and directed by Damian Mc Carthy
Shudder

The pain of losing a close family member can feel insurmountable, let alone when that close kin is a twin. Writer/director Damian Mc Carthy's follow-up to 2020's *Caveat* is about so much more than familial grief, but it's the main driver for all of the terror the film brings.

Oddity begins with the sudden, violent, offscreen death of Dani (Carolyn Bracken). A year later, Dani's husband Ted (Gwilym Lee) and identical twin sister Darcy (Bracken

again) have a quick meeting at her oddities shop where his impatience for the woman's spiritual gifts quickly surfaces. Ted, after all, is a doctor working in a mental hospital and has no place for anything beyond science, but he soon finds out the fantastical has all the time in the world for him. This visit between the grieving in-laws also happens to coincide with the anniversaries of Dani's murder as well as the brutal death of her killer... but in this film, there are no coincidences.

Relying heavily on its eerie remote Irish manor setting, *Oddity* makes great use of architectural angles and levels that add drama and peril beyond what a typical estate can offer. Equally creepy is the golem-esque wooden sculpture Darcy carries around: the figure is distorted, and



Oddity

oddly riveting. *Oddity* features some impressively effective jump scares and a plot that unravels via flashbacks but never overexplains what is happening, both today and the day that Dani died.

Of note, there is a strong thematic streak of vilifying people who dismiss magical thinking and feel superior for only believing in science and logic. It is a wee bit heavy-handed at times, but never to the point of distracting from the good stuff.

Part haunting and part supernatural golem flick, *Oddity*'s sensitive focus on sisterly bonds and some good old-fashioned scares make it a fun and engrossing time.

DEIRDRE CRIMMINS

A PLACE TO LOSE YOURSELF

THE MOOR

Starring Sophia La Porta, David Edward-Robertson and Bernard Hill
Directed by Chris Cronin
Written by Paul Thomas
Raven Banner Entertainment

Don't be fooled by *The Moor*'s first hour into thinking it's a standard British crime drama. That deceptive intro slow-burns to a fully supernatural second half that's not just full-on ghostly but even edges into Lovecraftian territory.

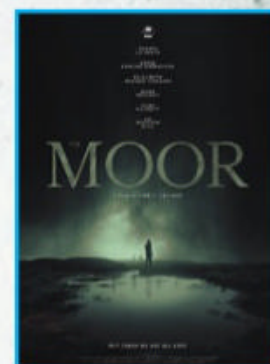
The Moor starts in 1997, when the Yorkshire area is plagued by a series of child disappearances. Cut to 25 years later, when failed podcaster Claire (Sophia La Porta, Censor) tries to help Bill (David Edward-Robertson), the father of one of the missing children. When the unnamed perpetrator of the crimes is set to be released from prison (he got a reduced sentence because no evidence was ever found), Bill becomes obsessed with searching the local moors for his son's remains. The moor, however, is huge and has so far yielded no clues, so Bill turns to a psychic, Alex (Mark Peachey), and his even more gifted daughter Eleanor (Elizabeth Dormer-Phillips) for help. Soon the group is lost on the moor, encountering treacherous peat bogs, freaky

sheep, and ancient Neolithic stone monuments.

The Moor spends most of its running time in its eponymous location, where director Chris Cronin and cinematographer Sam Cronin make full use of the eerie, fog-shrouded surroundings, expertly building a sense of unearthly dread. At two hours, *The Moor* could have used some trimming from the first half, but the film pays off handsomely from there on, leading to a genuinely shocking ending. In addition to the superb cast and cinematography, the film also boasts a throbbing, spooky score by Nir Perlman and some nicely done subtle effects, both practical and CGI.

Director Cronin, who made his name with short horror films, makes a fine feature debut here. Anyone looking for a good modern twist on either the ghost story or cosmic horror will find much to enjoy in *The Moor*.

LISA MORTON



A GRIM TALE

THE DEVIL'S BATH

Starring Anja Plaschg, Maria Hofstätter and David Scheid
Written and directed by Severin Fiala and Veronika Franz
Shudder

In today's political climate, with trans and abortion rights still on the battlefield, it's sometimes weirdly comforting to be transported back to a time when things were somehow, well, way the fuck worse.

Take, for example, 18th-century Austria, where *The Devil's Bath* lays its scene. The film kicks off with the wedding of rural cuties Agnes (Anja Plaschg) and Wolf (David Scheid), who are eager to start a modest, Christian life together. That is, until Wolf's mother Gänglin (Maria Hofstätter) emerges as the sort of mother-in-law clichés are born of: overbearing and controlling in a nobody's-good-enough-for-my-Wolf kind of



OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE DARES TO DREAM

DREAM 'N' SCREAM



WHAT HAVE YOU DONE, DANIEL?

Goredrome

I'm lucky to be one of those people who remembers their dreams when they wake up. Alas for Lance, the same thing can be said about my nightmares, so when I lay me down to sleep I don't know which way my head is gonna spin. Kind of like when I throw on a film for review in this column. So you'll understand how I felt some trepidation after I gazed upon this little-known Italian outing about a young man who looks after his invalid mother – bathing her, feeding her... and cleaning her up after she's beaten by her alcoholic husband. Following her inevitable death, our boy Daniel devolves into a dreamworld filled with satanic music and self-mutilation while he fends off the advances of his now sex-starved father. A troublesome watch, I found myself continually wondering if this was an indie art house film, a gay porno or a twisted psychological horror movie. After sleeping on it, I've decided to dream that it was a good movie and not the poorly acted, ineptly directed nightmare that it truly was.

BODY COUNT: 3

BEST DEATH: A shot every time you see someone in their underwear!

VIRTUAL DREAMING



DREAMS OF FLESH

Goredrome

I had a dream recently that my ex-girlfriend was eating my intestines right out of my abdomen like a big bowl of spaghetti, so I immediately knew that I had to watch more Italian horror! In this saucy side dish, a demented doctor develops a special serum that he combines with a virtual reality headset for use by patients who've suffered from psycho-traumatic episodes. The resulting hallucinogenic dreams send his patients into a lethal combination of highly volatile sex fantasies and abhorrent acts of death and dismemberment. With hardly any dialogue, *Dreams of Flesh* proves to be little more than a disturbing buffet of visceral violence on a budget both miniscule and misguided. For what it's worth, it is reminiscent of the 1983 sci-fi/horror classic *Brainstorm*, which makes me think that more capable hands could have rung out a juicier tale. One can only dream...

BODY COUNT: 6

BEST DEATH: A shot every time someone gets jabbed with a needle!

ONE WAY TICKET TO DREAMLAND



OPEN

Virgil Films

Have you ever found yourself dreaming about what you might have done if you had made different choices in your life? That's the premise in this intriguing outing about a woman named Emma whose troubled marriage leads her to date a former teen actor she had a crush on when she was younger. But what starts off as an innocent fantasy soon devolves into a terrifying nightmare when her former heartthrob turns out to be a complete psychopath. What sets *Open* apart from other movies of its ilk, however, are the musical dreams Emma has in which she's the lead singer in an '80s pop band. The songs reflect her fragile emotional state as her life, marriage, and mental health fall apart. Though it's devoid of blood, gore, or other redeeming qualities of an honest-to-goodness horror film, sometimes all you need is some eyeliner, a synthesizer, and a psycho with a machete to take me to dreamland!

BODY COUNT: 0

BEST DEATH: A shot every time you see someone wearing a bad wig!

LAST CHANCE LANCE

way. Making matters worse, the marriage remains unconsummated for reasons known only to Wolf and his male friend in the village, who commits suicide shortly after their nuptials. Blamed for not getting pregnant (and pretty much everything else under Gänglin's tyrannical reign), Agnes submits to the barbarism that was understood as medicine at the time to treat her "condition" – she's in the Devil's Bath, the locals whisper, as her behaviour becomes more erratic and her melancholy continues to spiral. Before Agnes was wed, a local woman turned herself in for the murder of a baby, leading to her beheaded corpse being publicly displayed as a cautionary tale for the rest of the village. Agnes loathes her life, but suicide is condemned by God... can she find another way out with her soul intact?



It's a Franz and Fiala film, folks, so let's not act too surprised that *The Devil's Bath* is a masterclass in the word *grim*. Full disclosure, the Austrian filmmaking duo told us about the concept for this film when we interviewed them for *The Lodge* back in 2019 – I've been salivating for it ever since and, boy, does it deliver the goods. It's period horror with the nature-witch vibes from *The Witch*, but with none of the good-for-her catharsis. It's the feminist feel-bad horror flick of the summer, and it leaves a nasty mark.

ANDREA SUBISSATI

ZOMBIES HAVE HEART

HANDLING THE UNDEAD

Starring Renate Reinsve, Anders Danielsen Lie and Bahar Pars

Directed by Thea Hvistendahl

Written by Thea Hvistendahl and John Ajvide Lindqvist
Neon

I've never described any zombie film as "sadly beautiful" and I probably won't ever again, but I've no qualms about hanging that mantle on *Handling the Undead*, a quiet and deeply heartfelt Norwegian effort.

No flesh-munching Zack Snyder rotfest, this. You can basically go down a checklist of zombie film tropes that are either completely absent from *Handling the Undead* or just given cursory nods. No spectacular splatter, no gross-out gags, no siege drama, not even the obligatory ham-fisted sociopolitical allegory.



Rather, *Handling the Undead* is dedicated exclusively to a topic all-too-rarely examined in the zombie canon: the excruciating mix of horror and heartbreak experienced by loved ones of the walking dead. Three intercut, unrelated stories play out episodically here as the recently deceased begin to rise in and around Oslo: a middle-aged woman killed in a car accident whose family is informed by hospital officials that she's suddenly showing signs of life, if just barely; a recently deceased young boy whose mother and grandfather must conceal him from prying eyes; and most poignant of all (for me at least), an elderly woman strug-

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WE GO ON REMASTERED

Some doors should never be opened. A man offers \$30,000 to the first person who can prove that we go on after death.

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AMSTERDAMNED

A murderous predator lurks down in the murky depths of Amsterdam's famous canals.

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THE DEVIL'S HONEY

A young woman abducts and subjects a doctor whom she holds responsible for the death of her boyfriend to unspeakable acts.

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BAD CGI GATOR

An unexpected freak accident with laptops turns a baby alligator into a giant badly rendered digital gator!

AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY AND DVD



BLOOD AND SNOW

Scientists uncover a meteorite in the Arctic that killed a scientist and infected another. The survivor they rescued may not be who they think she is.

AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY AND DVD



BAG OF LIES

Desperate to save his dying wife, Matt turns to The Bag, an ancient relic with dark magic. As his wife heals, Matt's sanity unravels, facing terrifying consequences.

AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY



DEATHDREAM (AKA DEAD OF NIGHT)

When Andy returns home from Vietnam, something is horribly wrong with him.

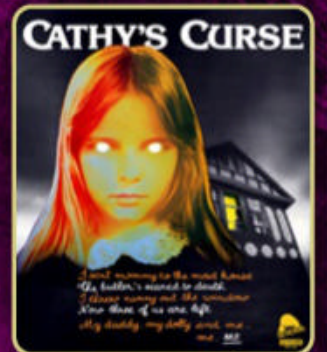
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BRING HER TO ME

A woman is plagued by nightmares about traveling to a dark realm and a demonic entity that awaits her arrival.

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CATHY'S CURSE

When a vengeful spirit possesses a child, it unleashes an unnerving nightmare of creepy mediums, demonic dolls and plenty of sick '70s moppet mayhem.

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SHORT CUTS



BITE-SIZED FRIGHTS
FOR SMALL APPETITES

ON THE SLAB: THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

GUESSING GAME

8:20 mins/YouTube via Lane Avenue Studios Channel

Bill (Josiah Overstreet) invites his two old college friends Andrew (Ricco Fajardo) and Karen (Sarah Mills) to a nice restaurant for dinner. As the night progresses, the couple notices that Bill is becoming nervous and distracted, escalating when the check arrives and he invites them to play a strange game. Zach Wincik's wonderfully tight and tense film was born out of a childhood game he used to play with family at restaurants, inspiring him to wonder what would happen if there was some "drastic consequence" for the loser. Even though the entirety of *Guessing Game* takes place at one small table, it's able to build a taut narrative with attention given to every facet of the production. Be warned: this short may make you want to dine and dash on your next night out!



HIDE AND SEEK

13:06 mins/Vimeo via Thomas Nicol's Channel

After Emma (Julia Robbins) puts her bratty younger sister Chloe (Eve Foley) to bed, Emma discovers that a mobile game has been mysteriously downloaded onto her phone. Curious, Emma plays along, and things take a turn for the sinister. Illinois-based filmmakers Thomas Nicol and Andrew F. Gleason unleashed this techno-horror on the world just as augmented reality was soaring, thanks to apps like *Pokémon Go*. *Hide and Seek* is Nicol and Gleason's fifth collaboration and one can see the confidence onscreen, with well-directed talent and castmembers that look like they are actually related. The spacious setting and the presentation of the deadly app are both solid assets to the film's production value, and the decision to incorporate a popular two-sentence horror story is a welcome choice. One more reason to believe that the internet will someday kill us all.

2 PLAYERS REQUIRED

04:52 mins/YouTube via Cameron Gallagher's Channel

While working through her grief at the loss of a loved one, Sara (Sara Hallisey) finds a crusty vintage board game in an old box. It clearly holds sentimental value, so she decides to play it one last time – but who's really controlling the pieces? New York native Cameron Gallagher is a self-professed VHS kid who grew up making home movies before graduating to more ambitious projects. As a short film, *2 Players Required* is impressive in that it says a lot in under five minutes (without any dialogue!) and features a solid performance from Hallisey, who also appears in two of Gallagher's other works available on his channel. This is just the kind of filmmaking that made the 2013 viral sensation *Lights Out* so effective. Who knows? Maybe we'll see Gallagher's work on the big screen sometime soon.

JAY CLARKE

gling to care for the reanimated remains of the woman she had been in love with for most of her life. If their near-motionless slow dance to Nina Simone's rendition of Jacques Brel's "Ne me quitte pas" doesn't leave your heart shredded, you ain't got one.

Gotta admit, some early red flags – a self-consciously drab, dialled-down colour scheme, extremely sparse dialogue, and the fact that basically nothing happens for the first 25 minutes – had me worried that I was in for more self-consciously "elevated" horror that gets stuck between the lobby and the second floor. But once these stories began to unfurl at their leisurely pace – ultimately clocking in at a most reasonable 97 minutes – I was (forgive me) dug in deep.

JOHN W. BOWEN

A SLOW BURN

TRIM SEASON

Starring Bethlehem Million, Alex Essoe, and Jane Badler

Directed by Ariel Vida

Written by David Blair and Ariel Vida

Blue Harbor Entertainment

The 2018 documentary miniseries *Murder Mountain* details just some of the deaths and unexplained disappearances that have occurred in and around the cannabis industry of northern California's Humboldt County. With promises of a shit ton of money for a couple of weeks' work trimming bud, the "emerald triangle" attracts many a soul every year who risk much to work in outlaw territory.

In *Trim Season*, Emma (Bethlehem Million, star of the pandemic slasher *Sick*) is one such soul. After losing her job and her apartment in the same day, she's desperate enough to ignore all of the red flags tossed about by a recruiter and heads off in a van into the deep woods along with her bestie Julia (*Starry Eyes*' Alex Essoe) and a handful of other misfits. They're welcomed by company matriarch Mona (Jane Badler, the guinea pig-gobbling alien lizard queen from *I*), who is as sinister as she is sophisticated. When one of the trimmers hits Mona's private stash, the group finds themselves in peril, miles from help.

Though it revolves around weed culture, *Trim Season* isn't a stoner horror-comedy in line with *Evil Bong*; surprisingly, it's a character-driven, often-bloody, folk horror-flavoured fairy tale. There's a lot of conversation, and impatient viewers should take note that this is a "stuff happens in the last fifteen minutes" kind of slow burn that, for some, may be too little, too late. But the cast (including the always-welcome Bex Taylor-Klaus of *Hell Fest*) will likely have you invested regardless – particularly Badler, who plays Mona with just the right amount of camp.

I won't lie to you, reader: given the presence of Essoe and the iconic Badler – not to mention a weed strain called "Susan Lucci" – I was doomed to dig *Trim Season*. That it centres on witchery in the deep woods pretty much guaranteed that I'd call it a winner, so take all of this for what you will. But even above and beyond all that, I'd be recommending this weird mood piece.

STACIE PONDER



**A FIERCE INDIE FLICK FROM
TRUE-CRIME GURU ANDREW
FITZGERALD TACKLES
TERRITORY MOST GENRE
FILMS WON'T DARE**

TRUE

BY **RICKY J. DUARTE**

TRAUMA

In many cases, the horrors of real life far outweigh anything we might see in a scary movie. While fiction is often inspired by true events, there's a certain disconnect which allows audiences to enjoy upsetting and shocking material while chalking it up to its potential entertainment value. Infamous midwestern murderer Ed Gein, for example, may have provided inspiration for the likes of Norman Bates, Buffalo Bill, and Leatherface, but the fact that an actual human being could carry out such unspeakable acts just hits differently than any fictionalized account. NYC-based writer/director Andrew Fitzgerald understands this all too well: his massively successful YouTube channel, [Scary Mysteries](#), currently boasts upwards of 800k subscribers and has documented some of the world's most horrific true-crime cases over a thousand-plus episodes since its launch in 2016. This knowledge of – and passion for – the evils of humanity has clearly paved the way for his new feature, *An Angry Boy*, available to stream on June 7.

"My whole world is true crime – that's what I do for a living," Fitzgerald tells *Rue Morgue*. "I cover those stories. I wanted to make [*An Angry Boy*] for this audience and make it super dark."

And boy, is it dark. *An Angry Boy* tells of Owen (Scott Callenberger), a teenager who suddenly and unexpectedly finds himself a social media star for a random act of heroism that's captured on camera. The video goes viral online, and the sudden exposure leaves him vulnerable to monsters from his past he has no recollection of, as a traumatic childhood event has forced him to block out most of his early memories. Owen soon discovers that he escaped a community of child traffickers who will stop at nothing to cover their tracks. With only the help of his best friend Caleb (Ricky Anderson) and his slowly resurfacing memories, Owen sets out to seek answers and exact revenge on the cult of pedophilic predators before another child is harmed.

There is horror that's meant to entertain, and there is horror that closely reflects the uncomfortable truths of the real world: *An Angry Boy* succeeds

in doing both. In a world where celebrity predators are common headline fodder and the idea of "grooming" is too often casually thrown around in the media, Fitzgerald's story walks a very fine line between making an entertaining horror film and exploring a subject that's considered by many to be too taboo for audiences of any genre.

"[Pedophilia is] a hard topic to tackle, for sure," he admits, "I mean, it immediately turns people off. The very idea is gross, and the reality is [audiences] can only take so much, and with film it's interesting because you want to push that limit. Bringing awareness to it is something that's important because it is something that happens and, yeah, we don't really talk about it because people are just like, 'No thanks. I'd rather sip my coffee and pretend it's not happening.'"

Between the rigours of a tight budget, gory practical effects, and the sensitive subject matter, Fitzgerald knew he was asking a lot of his cast and crew; particularly Callenberger, who makes a stunning feature debut in *An Angry Boy* and has scooped up several Best Actor awards as the film continues to make the festival rounds. The adult talent also shines, with bold performances by actors willing to portray society's most reviled offenders. Hollywood A-lister Eric Roberts even makes a daring appearance as the creepy, born-again leader of the film's NAMBLA-esque trafficking ring ("He just came in for two days and was like, boom-boom," says Fitzgerald).

But ultimately, what makes *An Angry Boy* such a singular cinematic experience is in its masterful handling of its difficult, but no less real and hideous, subject matter – something that only an independent

production and competent hand would dare tackle.

"[Audiences] ask me, 'How did you deal with writing this?'" he remarks. "I don't want to say [I'm] desensitized but just being in the true-crime world, only the really messed-up things are going to hit you. And I felt like if it [resonated] with us, then it would hit with audiences. So, when people say it's disturbing, it means we did our job." 🍷



REISSUED & REANIMATED

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD



THE SAVAGE HUNT OF KING STAKH RIDES AGAIN

The Wild Hunt is a recurring myth in European folklore concerning a regal or heroic figure leading a group of supernatural hunters, and has inspired a number of fictional works in more modern times. Variations on it have appeared in *Hellboy* and *Thor* comics, TV's *Teen Wolf*, and the award-winning 2009 Canadian feature *The Wild Hunt*. A more obscure adaptation is the 1980 Belarusian film *The Savage Hunt of King Stakh*, and that status is about to change thanks to the joined forces of two companies specializing in off-the-beaten-track screen fare.

Directed by Valeri Rubinchik and scripted by Rubinchik and Vladimir Korotkevich from the novel by Uladzimir Karatkevich, *The Savage Hunt of King Stakh* is a folk-horror saga of dark, surreal beauty. Boris Plotnikov stars as Andrey, a scholar who travels to a remote castle in the marshes, where he meets Nadezhda (Elena Dimitrova), the last surviving member of a once noble family. She tells him of King Stakh, who was murdered in the 15th century by one of her ancestors, and who now pursues vengeance against her family as the spectral figurehead of the Wild Hunt. As Andrey learns that this is no mere legend, he is confronted by a series of bizarre and frightening sights and characters.

A jury prize winner at the 1980 Montreal World Film Festival (where it screened as *Wild Hunting of King Stakh*), the movie also took the Golden Raven award at 1983's Brussels International Festival of Fantasy Film. But aside from theatri-

cal engagements in New York City and Toronto in the spring of 1982, and as part of Russian film festivals in other cities, *Savage Hunt* has had to wait until now to receive significant exposure. That's occurring via a Deluxe Slipcase Edition Blu-ray arriving this month as the first title in a new partnership between Deaf Crocodile Films and DiabolikDVD.

Deaf Crocodile's previous output has included numerous other Eastern European fantasy features and everything from the once-lost blaxploitation opus Solomon King to Bill Plympton's animated musical comedy *The Tune*. DiabolikDVD has become the internet's largest distributor of genre and specialty home-video titles. They've begun pre-orders on *King Stakh*, which is presented on the disc in its fully restored director's cut, and are also offering six- and twelve-month subscriptions to Deaf Crocodile's Deluxe releases. According to Dennis Bartok, Deaf Crocodile's co-founder and head of acquisitions and distribution, Rubinchik's haunting epic was a perfect fit for his company — once they were able to hunt it down.

"I keep a little list in the back of my brain of obscure and hard-to-find titles, and *King Stakh* was on there the longest time of any — over 30 years!" Bartok tells *Rue Morgue*. "Craig [Rogers, Deaf Crocodile's co-founder and head of postproduction and restoration] and I often talk about Deaf Croc's sweet spot as the crossover between art house and genre, and that's a per-



fect description of *King Stakh*. It's a gorgeous, mysterious, and melancholy folk-horror movie, with overtones of late 1960s and early 1970s Italian horror along with British films of the '70s like *The Wicker Man* and *The Blood on Satan's Claw*. It's also very much an art house film, with its portrait of a decadent and dying aristocratic family haunted by the legend of the spectral King Stakh and his ghost army."

Tracking down the movie and its rights took several years, Bartok reveals. They were eventually able to close the deal with the help of Alla Verlotsky at Seagull Films, with whom Deaf Crocodile has partnered on several past releases. Rogers notes that given *King Stakh*'s age and rarity, getting the movie into visual shape was a particular challenge.

“We had to use the only elements available to us,” he says, “and aside from the usual instability, dust, and dirt, there was a slow chromatic pulse throughout. It was too slow to call ‘flicker’ – and also too slow to be corrected with most restoration software. We’ve done what we could to mitigate it, but it still crops up in some shots. I’m sure I’m much more aware of it than the average viewer will be, as I worked on it *looking* for issues like this... and doing it without sound, which tremendously accentuates visual concerns.”

Unfortunately, when it came to putting together special features for *King Stakh*, between the passing of Valeri Rubinchik in 2011 and the political situation in Belarus and Russia right now, they weren’t able to connect with any surviving cast or crew. So they turned instead to past colleagues for extras that put the movie into historical perspective.

“We’re switching to much longer booklets starting with *King Stakh*,” Bartok explains, “so we commissioned essays by critic Walter Chaw, one of our favourite collaborators, and film historian and professor Peter Rollberg, an expert in Soviet and Eastern European cinema. Comics artist and film historian Stephen Bissette – another of our favourite people to work with – and Mike White of *The Projection Booth* delivered two separate and brilliantly researched commentary tracks, and historian and YouTuber Evan Chester created a video essay. Finally, we were able to get another great friend, filmmaker and author Kier-La Janisse, to do a special video introduction. She mentions *King Stakh* in her masterful documentary *Woodlands Dark and Days Bewitched*, so it was wonderful she was able to talk about it for our release.”

As for their new partner on the distribution side, DiabolikDVD owner Jesse Nelson has been a fan of Bartok and Rogers’ work for years, going back to their days with distributor Cinelicious Pics.

“When they contacted Diabolik in 2023 to explore some options for when their contract [with previous distrib OCN] expired, I immediately knew I wanted to make this partnership happen,” says Nelson. “There are few labels from which I collect every title, but Deaf Crocodile is



The Savage Hunt of King Stakh

one of them. From their amazing restoration of the previously lost *Solomon King* to wild animation like *Delta Space Mission* and, of course, the fantasy films of Aleksandr Ptushko, their curation is boldly unique, focusing on films most other labels aren’t even looking at and honestly are mostly off my radar. They already have a long list of films licensed and planned for well into next year,” including *The Outcasts*, a witchcraft thriller directed by *Blood on Satan’s Claw* scripter

Robert Wynne-Simmons, and a new Blu-ray of the Bartok-written and -produced anthology *Trapped Ashes*.

“We’d been in discussions with Jesse for a while about partnering,” says Bartok, “and then the scheduling worked out perfectly that *King Stakh* was first up. We really wanted to lead off with something rare and wonderful for film lovers and Deaf Croc fans, and *King Stakh* definitely fits that description.”





CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT

R



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

Roid Rage Rats

by John W. Bowen

As animal phobias go, we tend to get chronically creeped by one denizen or another of nature's Unholy Trinity: snakes, spiders, and rats. For sundry Freudian and Judeo-Christian reasons, snakes take the top spot, followed closely by spiders (our Andrea Subissati will testify, as will I), whereas rats come in a distant third. Musophobia (which covers mice too) is a bugaboo more common to city dwellers and folks who grew up poor (Stephen King and my late mom). And where there's a phobia, there's a horror cinema niche, ready to exploit or cater to it. (Shit, what's the difference, right?)

Canadian cult gem *Of Unknown Origin* (1983) remains the champ among more discerning devotees of ratular delights, mixing post-*Jaws* tropes with nods to Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, powered by Peter Weller's performance, a weird mix of spiralling madness and stony stoicism. For reasons I'll never fathom, 1971's *Willard*, which always bored me to incontinence, still seems the rodent opus of choice for the horror hoi polloi; the less said of its poor(er) relative *Ben* (1972) the better.

Prefer your vermin supersized? *The Food of the Gods* (1976) features more kinds of critters than Farmer Vincent fritters, with gigantic mutant rats leading the charge like some *Once Upon a Hamster* episode gone horribly wrong, although they get hopelessly upstaged by Marjoe Gortner's glorious fight to the death with an eight-foot-tall chicken. *Graveyard Shift* (1990), a tenth-rate adaptation of a second-tier Stephen King yarn, features regular rats alongside some variety of poorly constructed enormo-varmint, but it's ultimately more noteworthy for its actors affecting really appalling Maine accents. But take note, all you rat horror completists feeling strangely incomplete; you may somehow have overlooked 1982's Toronto-shot infestation-fest *Deadly Eyes*, loosely based on James Herbert's pulp semi-classic *The Rats* and directed by Rob-



ert Clouse, who's best remembered for *Enter the Dragon* and blaxploitation footnote *Black Belt Jones*, and hence – perhaps – forgiven for *Gymkata*.

Deadly Eyes' premise sputters to life with a cargo ship full of steroid-enhanced grain getting noshed upon by big-city harbour rodentry, quickly resulting in a biblical plague of carnivorous, oversized-though-not-quite-giant rats. Said varmints initially endear themselves to us by eating a baby (sadly offscreen, so don't get too excited) and later commit further dastardlies in a bowling alley, a newly-opened subway line, and – best of all – a movie theatre in a scene that simultaneously tips its ratty hat to *The Blob* and to its own director (the venue is presenting a Bruce Lee retrospective).

Of course, any self-respecting rat-plague movie also requires human characters with semi-convincing human problems (read: romantic entanglements and workplace politics) to flesh out the whole mess, but let's address practical matters. Just how does *Deadly Eyes* deliver on said oversized-though-not-quite-giant rats? Well, remember 1959's *The Killer Shrews*? More to the point, remember when disguising a bunch of big dogs as giant shrews backfired hilariously in *The Killer Shrews*? Well, the producers of *Deadly Eyes* either remained untaught by that teachable moment or more likely just

never saw the film, because they saw fit to employ a small army of dachshunds kitted out in rat masks which, when the sausagey little bastards periodically stray out of the shadows and into the cold light of day, look less like rats and more like dachshunds in rat masks.

Not that the script – which veers between shitty and really, really shitty – does much to distract us from said prosthetic shortcomings, although the cast gives it the old community college try. Fans of the short-lived '70s Canadian TV series

Police Surgeon (we know you're out there!) wondering whatever became of Sam Groom may take solace (or despair) to see him in everyman-turned-reluctant-horror-hero mode here as a high school teacher pursuing a hot health department drone (Sara Botsford) while getting stalked by a hotter (and hilariously nymphomaniacal) schoolgirl (Lisa Langlois). Scatman Crothers – who, according to many sources, required large amounts of weed to be delivered to the set daily – brings his accustomed charisma to the periphery as a disgruntled city worker. And not one of them has a hope in hell of elevating *Deadly Eyes* above its own innate pestilence, and aren't we just fine with that anyway?

Now put that cheese back in the trap and get the hell out of my... (ker-chunk!) Oh alright, ya big baby, hang on, I'm calling the ambulance. 🚑



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FILES FROM THE BLACK MUSEUM

THE LONG SHADOWS OF CLASSIC HORROR'S PAST

BY PAUL CORUPE

Laughing Your Head Off

"THE BAT WHISPERS IS ONE OF THE EARLIEST PARODIES OF CLASSIC HORROR CINEMA, A SOMETIMES-FORGOTTEN EFFORT THAT BRINGS TOGETHER A SPOOKY STATELY HOME, MISSING MONEY, AND A MASKED CRIMINAL."

If there's nothing funny about fear, then why have audiences made horror comedies a hot ticket in the post-COVID era? While some stubborn fans continue to insist that chills and chuckles just don't mix, lately theatres have been stacked with tongue-in-cheek terrors such as *Lisa Frankenstein* (2024) and *Late Night with the Devil* (2024), alongside big-budget sequels to 1980s franchise comedy favourites *Ghostbusters* (1984) and *Beetlejuice* (1988). But regardless of whether you love 'em or hate 'em, horror comedies are a playful time-honoured tradition that can expose the genre's inner workings and help us better appreciate how horror scares us all. Recently out on Blu-ray from VCI, *The Bat Whispers* (1930) is one of the earliest parodies of classic horror cinema, a sometimes-forgotten effort that brings together a spooky stately home, missing money, and a masked criminal.

Directed by Roland West as a talkie remake of his silent film *The Bat* (1926) – itself based on a hit 1920s stage play – *The Bat Whispers* is the story of Mrs. Van Gorder (Grayce Hampton), a rich socialite staying at a rented countryside home with her niece (Una Merkel) and maid (Maude Eburne). But the anxious houseguests find it hard to relax when there are strange noises and a shadowy figure lurking around on the grounds. It's soon revealed that renowned criminal The Bat is in the vicinity, convinced that the proceeds from a recent bank heist have been stashed in a secret room within the creaky manor. Under the cover of night, The Bat attempts to frighten off Mrs. Van Gorder and other recent arrivals, including a suspicious gardener (William Bakewell), an aggressive police inspector (Chester Morris), an unfriendly doctor (Gustav von Seyffertitz), and a bumbling private investigator (Charles Dow Clark).

The Bat Whispers is a fun update to the usual old dark house setting with visually dynamic camerawork and some memorable comic diversions. Horror comedies are usually thought of as a more recent phenomenon, but they actually date back as far as the silent film era, when directors recognized that good gags and shocking scares work equally well to evoke primal,



visceral reactions from viewers. While laughter and fear may initially seem to be at odds, horror and comedy often work in a similar way by subverting our sense of normalcy – the absurd and chaotic situations these films present can be scary or ridiculous, depending on how they're depicted. For example, consider Eburne's portrayal of the high-strung maid, who at one point lobs a huge bear trap out the window in a futile effort to trap The Bat, or Clark's dim-witted PI, who gets brained by a

mysteriously tossed flowerpot before he dubiously exclaims, "I ain't no cheap gumshoe – detecting crime with me is a work of art!"

But *The Bat Whispers* is about more than breaking up cinematic tension with occasional jokes. Just as more modern works such as *Scream* (1996) and *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) skirt the line between straightforward scares and knowing satire, *The Bat Whispers* also operates as a send-up of the old dark house at a time when the subgenre's tropes still seemed relatively fresh. Similar to *Clue* (1985) more than 50 years later, the film's tongue-in-cheek approach features overly melodramatic plotting, wildly expressive shadows, and a red herring lurking behind every hidden panel – enough knowing nods to make us reconsider these formulaic elements as simple, exaggerated affectations. But *The Bat Whispers* saves the best for last – in the fourth-wall-breaking finale, the filmmakers suggest that The Bat is loose in the theatre before star Morris emerges to politely ask the audience to not reveal the film's final twist; he explains that The Bat is so heartbroken when his identity is revealed that "he goes for days, killing people without the slightest enjoyment for his work."

The Bat Whispers and other recent humorous hits take the bite out of the genre's most overused tropes in a way that keeps filmmakers pushing horror cinema in new and exciting directions. That's why, despite their sometimes-divisive reputation, horror comedies always seem to get the last laugh. 🐈



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BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

Devour, a new West-African-inspired graphic novel by Jazmine Joyner, opens with a storybook-like telling of the Ghanaian folktale of Anansi, the spider trickster. It then jumps to Louisiana where the elderly Otis is sharing a childhood tale of the day his younger brother, Tim, entered the mysterious Turner house, a residence strictly off limits to outsiders. Tim had emerged from the home in deep shock, saying he met a talking spider that grew to giant-size and spewed hundreds of little spiders from its mouth, engulfing him and burrowing deep into his skin...

It's a stark contrast to the child-friendly folktale with the only link seemingly being Anansi the spider. It's a tad ironic, therefore, that the legend of Anansi was not top-of-mind for Joyner when they set out to write a horror book.

"I didn't necessarily choose Anansi," reveals Joyner. "This story was born from a question my mentor John Jennings asked me, 'What if Anansi went mad?' From there, I dreamt up the first chapter of this book, Otis's story about his brothers and him visiting the Turner House. Then I wanted to explore that family and the circumstances that led Anansi to become the horror in that short story. *Devour* eventually became the graphic novel."

The remainder of the book focuses on the modern-day Turner family, specifically young Patsy Turner, her brothers, and her single father, who move back to Louisiana to care for her ailing grandmother, Vassie. Initially resentful of having to uproot her entire life, Patsy soon relents when she learns Vassie is the last in a line of powerful root women, dating back to the days their ancestors were plantation slaves. Patsy has been marked to take over from Vassie and not only learn the necessary magic only women can



Devour: A terrifying take on the West African folktale of Anansi the trickster spider.

wield, but also be curator of the family's deepest secret: its role in guarding the imprisoned Anansi, driven mad by the suffering of the African slaves who worshipped him, and who, if set loose, could bring chaos to the entire world.

A good portion of the book's middle section is taken up by Patsy's education — not only in her grandmother's occult arts but also the legend of Anansi. It grounds the story deeply in its West African roots and, to its credit, is never tedious, something that comes as a relief to the author.

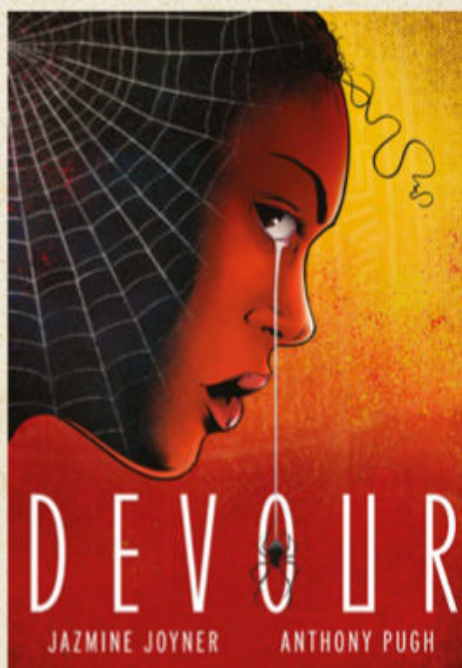
"I spent a lot of time researching rootwork and hoodoo and taking my learnings to create a magick that was unique to the story," says Joyner. "It was challenging to add education about what rootwork is and not make the

dialogue sound like a textbook. Having Vassie sound like the matriarch of this family but also a firm teacher was a fun challenge to work out."

The groundwork pays off in the third act, when Anansi inevitably escapes and wreaks havoc on Patsy and her family. It's an unrelenting and bloody descent into pure horror as Anansi literally devours anyone in his way, with plenty of body-bursting gooeyness that should appeal to horror fans regardless of cultural background. Meanwhile, as the reader is distracted by all the viscera, Joyner manages to pull the rug out from under all our expectations, leading to several unpredictable and shocking twists.

"Octavia Butler is a huge influence on my writing," the author notes. "I love her work and a theme I notice through a lot of her work is the fact that her protagonists are never safe. I notice in my writing I want to keep that main character safe. I want to protect them from the evils in the story, but real life isn't like that. Bad things happen." 🕷️

FOLLOW PEDRO ON X @PCABEZUELO



QUICK CUTS

Sweetie Candy Vigilante is back with her unique brand of confectionary craziness. The first issue of Volume 2 kicks off with the long-awaited confrontation between Sweetie and her arch-rival, Bart Volgare, the man she believes is responsible for her parents' disappearance. He's also trying to stop her candy store's mission to make New York City a sweeter place (how dare!). It's a sugary showdown on the snowy streets of the Big Candied Apple filled with exploding jawbreakers, acid candy powder, mouth-melting bubble gum, Easter egg grenades, and lethal jellybeans. Impressively, the book takes itself just seriously enough to avoid turning into a full-blown parody, which makes the graphic violence that much more effective, but the key element that ultimately makes the story work is Sweetie herself. Affable yet able to turn into a ruthless killer at the drop of a bonbon, her unpredictability paints a slightly unhinged picture of someone who will go to any length to make her sugarcoated vision come true.



It's 1975 America and Danielle Pryer is ready to ditch her hick town and redneck alcoholic father, but before she can make her move, her brother Bruce, who went missing in the Vietnam War, suddenly returns. There's something not quite right with Bruce and his homecoming is soon interrupted by exploding bodies and a bizarre crew of strange creatures. The first half of *The Last Wardens* is routine fare, with Danielle, her friends, and her dad painted in rather broad strokes. It's only when Bruce literally bursts on the scene that the book enters more interesting territory, due primarily to Rui Silveira's creative and gore-ific art that channels John Carpenter's *The Thing* with a pinch of Stuart Gordon's Lovecraft adaptations.



At its core. *The Principles of Necromancy* is a typical journey into body horror. The eerie Dr. Jakob Eyes, the world's first necromancer, travels through a war-torn medieval landscape looking to further his experiments. This includes physically augmenting a desperate band of barbarians struggling to fight back against imperial forces. But whether the deformed monstrosities that emerge from the good doctor's tent are worth the



price paid by the hapless savages is debatable. Effective use of body horror relies heavily on the imagination and talent of the artist, and in this case, Eamon Winkle is up to the challenge. His twisted, patchwork creatures are appropriately grotesque, imbuing even the simpler designs with haunting imagery. The art's deceptive simplicity is matched by the straightforward narrative of the first issue, a seemingly self-contained tale that leaves you wondering where the story could possibly go next; a much more compelling introduction than if the issue had signposted its direction and ended on a cliffhanger.

It's obvious when reading the anthology *Hemlock Ave* that writer Richard T. Wilson is interested in exploring different aspects of horror. While all four tales share similar themes – most notably, regret – each has its own distinct feel.

The bookend stories hearken back to classic EC yarns: in the first, a young punk gets more than he bargained for when he takes a bet to visit an unmarked grave at midnight; and in the last, a drunk driver obsessed with days gone by survives a car accident and wakes up to find himself a little boy again and forced to confront some unpleasant childhood truths. Both stories gamely mix traditional scares with philosophical musings but the balance in each just



misses the mark. More successful are the two middle outings which deal with a middle-aged woman seeking shelter in a stranger's home during a rainstorm, and a little boy waiting for his father at a late-night bus stop. Though devoid of typical jump-scares, Wilson's handling of nostalgia and remorse – along with climaxes open to interpretation – effectively leaves its mark on the reader.

It's bad enough being a middle-aged man still living with his mother; it's even worse when

you're also the town's laughingstock and accused of being a crackpot clairvoyant. Thing is, Paul Rinaldi really is psychic – though most of the time can't quite decipher the visions he experiences in his sleep as lucid dreams. A new rash of terrifying visions, along with a series of missing persons cases, leads Paul to join forces with rookie detective Abigail Dahlin. Much of *Midstate's* first issue is spent on Paul's troubles and his new relationship with Abi, with the occasional bloody interruption either through one of Paul's dreams or the suspicious activities of the town's paraplegic doctor and his frosty female assistant. The result is a solid, character-driven introduction with the promise of horrific things to come. 🍬





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BOOKS

A DOORWAY TO JOE:
THE ART OF JOE COLEMANJoe Coleman
Fantagraphics

If our world is a Hell of degradation, corruption, exploitation, and torture, Joe Coleman is its foremost painter and iconographer. *A Doorway to Joe* leads into his temple of obsessions where freaks, pop-celebrities, serial killers, and politicians become indistinguishable. More than 150 paintings from a four-decade career are lovingly reproduced here in all their lurid, gory glory. Disembowelled corpses, mutant babies, religious mutilations, geeks and freak shows among the blood and vomit, anti-sexual pornography, and over-the-top splatter are all here, presided over by the detailed portraits of your historical butchers Dillinger, bin Laden, and Oppenheimer,

eccentric cultural heroes E.A. Poe and Hunter S. Thompson, and villains like Charles Manson, Ed Gein, and Henry Lee Lucas (the latter inspired Coleman's artwork for the original poster of *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*).

This 450-page compendium of visionary nightmares reveals Coleman as a comic-book Bosch, a Robert Crumb cum Marquis de Sade on a very bad acid trip, a demented Dante whose infernal icons wouldn't be out of place in Jodorowsky's Church of Santa Sangre, but are simply streamlined from the archives of our daily true-crime pages. Few demons (clearly metaphorical) are to be seen in this man-made hell, because it's rooted in the realistic maxim that a man is a wolf to another man (or woman)!

Featuring an introduction by Tom Waits and texts by experts who illuminate the paintings (many spread on two pages), plus photographs from "Odditorium," Coleman's own collection of sick artifacts, *A Doorway to Joe* is bursting with the worst of (in)humanity – not leering, nor worshipping, but relentlessly despising it. This is a book for those who felt that *Cannibal Holocaust*, *Salò*, or the *120 Days of Sodom*, *A Serbian Film*, and *Irreversible* were too mild in dealing with the blackness of the human heart!

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

HATE HOUSE

John C. Foster
Encyclopocalypse Publications

Last year in this section, we learned all about spite houses with Johnny Compton's *The Spite House*. Now, from that same catalogue of homes with threatening auras, comes John C. Foster's *Hate House*, another abode with a dark past and deadly present.

Private investigator Megan French, known for her discretion and the *Dateline* episode concerning the contentious death of her partner Josh, finds herself hired by a wheelchair-bound old man named Abbott, who was held prisoner at Hate House for ten years, to help determine the property's ownership. Once there, she will meet a representative from the other side of the legal dispute and together they are to look for anything that might provide clarity on the matter. Built on its own island with a now washed-out bridge, Hate House is a deliciously weird and creepy abode, with its crustacean-strewn second floor hall, impossibly pristine upper level, and the deeply disturbing secrets housed within – and partially revealed in Abbott's increasingly paranoid and unhinged prison diary. Foster excels in this section with cinematic descriptions that turn this long-cursed abode into an active participant in the proceedings (and make us long for a film version). Unsurprisingly, Hate House is not a particularly safe place for Megan and her fellow investigator to be.



fashion that there are things more hostile and dangerous than angry ghosts, and we'd be smart to not piss them off.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

SO WITCHES WE BECAME

Jill Baguchinsky
Little, Brown and Company

A group of teens on the cusp of college collide with a shameful piece of history and a deadly spell that has long outlived its originators in this young adult horror novel that utilizes #metoo era sentiments and revelations to fuel its unsettling siege-story-esque plot.

Harper, Dia, and Nell (and chaperone Harry) are en route to a week-long stay at a swanky vacation home on a private island – a graduation gift courtesy of Harper's wealthy stepfather. It's a trip that comes with strict rules and things start going wrong as soon as Harper's boyfriend Gavin and his buddy Christopher show up unexpectedly. An already tense situation is made worse when the boys can't leave – the only way off the island is suddenly blocked by a choking, acrid fog that covers everything it engulfs with a tar-like substance, destroying their vehicles and the property's perimeter lights alike. Christopher becomes the first casualty when he attempts to swim to shore and is attacked by something beneath the water, removing the only other potential escape route.

Will the group figure out what's happening and how to stop it before the fog and tar completely overtake the vacation rental, or will they die here like so many others who came before? Nell's had some experience with the supernatural, which could help, but Gavin's becoming increasingly unhinged and dangerous, which does not. Author Jill Baguchinsky does a terrific job of making the sociopathic Gavin as threatening as the mysterious substance creeping over the island, and if the magic worked during the novel's denouement felt a bit too on-the-nose that can probably be chalked up to the fact that I'm a jaded fortysomething woman and not the intended audience.

This one's primarily for teen girls who love the spooky stuff and could use a potent, topical reminder of their inherent (and irrepressible) strength, resilience, power, and voice.

MONICA S. KUEBLER





The Satanic Screen: F.W. Murnau's Faust (1926).

THE SATANIC SCREEN: AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO THE DEVIL IN CINEMA

Nikolas Schreck

Headpress



Lucifer, the light-bringer, has always favoured the seductive magic of the flickering images, ever since the arch-magician Georges Méliès officially made the first horror film, *Le manoir du diable*, in 1896. Nikolas Schreck's book offers an authoritative historical overview of the evolution of cinematic representations of the Devil in all its guises: male, female, young, old, crone, monster, angel, and everything in between. The Fallen Angel's sexuality is as fluid as its morality, and the wealth of insights in this 430-page compendium clearly show that this figure was able to assume both the most positive and the most negative connotations, depending on the age, the author, and the politics of the times.

It's all covered here, from the silent masterpieces such as F.W. Murnau's *Faust* (1926), through the inevitable blockbusters – *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *The Exorcist* (1973), and *The Omen* (1976) – to this century's iterations of the Devil and the demonic (Schreck's dissection of turds like *The Omega Code* is devilishly funny). The author is an insider, a practicing occultist, and an ex-member of the Satanic Church, but while his sympathy for the Devil is obvious, his book is commendably level-headed when it comes to evaluating the films' achievements.

Back in 2001, Creation Press brought this book's first edition. This is its updated text, with an expanded introduction, various small additions throughout, and with a sizeable appendix: an original chapter whose 85 pages cover the Devil in 21st-century cinema. The book boasts a new, superior design and is heavily illustrated with rare still photographs and posters. *The Satanic Screen* is an expert study on a substantial topic, a lovingly produced and seductive beauty, and a total must-have for all lovers of horror cinema. The power of this book compels you!

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE PALACE THEATER

John Urbancik

Dark Fluidity

John Urbancik's latest release is arguably his most ambitious novel to date. Dangerous, high stakes action, fantastical imagination, and magic – lots and lots of magic – are all on full display here. Be ready to put in some work of your own, though, because there's a lot going on. And best take your time, or you're bound to miss some vital detail within the expansive tapestry of shifting timelines and altered realities that play out across a backdrop of devious intentions and apocalyptic probabilities.

DANTE'S PICK



GORE-GEOUS: PERSONAL ESSAYS ON BEAUTY AND HORROR

Alexandra West

Astrophil Press at University of South Dakota

In this revealing, smart, surprisingly moving, and often very funny book, Alexandra West, who co-hosts (with Andrea Subissati) the *Faculty of Horror* podcast, probes those places where horror and our standardized ideas of beauty collide and maul each other. Each of the five chapters in *Gore-Geous: Personal Essays on Beauty and Horror* selects a pair of films to comment on notions of feminine beauty; West mixes her thoughts on culture and movies with personal experience to create a book that is thought-provoking while still being easy to read (this is not, in other words, an academic work crammed with theories you'll have to look up).

The first chapter examines the meaning of the witch/hag and artificial vs. natural beauty through the lens of Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and 1990's *The Witches*. Chapter Two uses *Carrie* (1976) and *The Loved Ones* (2009) to discuss how high school proms function to train us for adulthood. Chapter Three looks at our cultural obsession with bodily perfection (West confesses painfully here to her own eating issues) through the lens of *American Psycho* (2000) and *Black Swan* (2010). In Chapter Four, West delves into how women's sexuality threatens patriarchal norms, using *Cat People* (1942) and *Under the Skin* (2013) to provide examples of horror undermining masculine power. The final chapter reveals the deceitful qualities of weddings by laying bare the truths shown in *Audition* (1999) and *Ready or Not* (2019). West also provides a brief but useful list of sources, and an introduction and afterword, in which she argues that "horror gives us a vocabulary to talk about everything our society represses, fears, and marginalizes."

In *Gore-Geous*, West insightfully suggests how any of us can access that vocabulary in our own investigations of beauty, provided we can be honest with and about ourselves.

LISA MORTON



SICKNESS IS THE ADDICTION IN MICHAEL J. SEIDLINGER'S NEW NOVEL *THE BODY HARVEST*

VIRUS CHASERS

BY MONICA S. KUEBLER

MOST OF US TRY TO AVOID ILLNESSES, WHETHER THAT BE BY WEARING A MASK DURING THE PANDEMIC OR PRACTICING GOOD HYGIENE OR ASPIRING TO A MORE ACTIVE LIFESTYLE.

Not so for *The Body Harvest*'s Will and Olivia, two down-on-their-luck, unlikely friends who share an unusual addiction.

"I knew that virus chasers existed [in real-life]," says author Michael J. Seidlinger, "and I was fascinated with the idea, or like, just what would cause someone to be so into something that is outwardly trying to destroy your body. So that was there before anything else. And then with the body horror element, what happened is I started to take the idea of exploring a virus-chaser group or a character [and] it evolved into two specific characters that within my research and trying to think through the methodology of how they even got to that point – grief was the answer. ... They meet via an online grief-share group and bond over the fact that they both are into essentially self-destruction via viruses."

As *The Body Harvest* (out July 23 from CLASH Books) opens, Will and Olivia are on the hunt for their next "crash"; something they seek out by coughing in each other's faces, licking doorknobs, and having unprotected encounters with sex workers. Addicts of the first order, the pair name their infections and catalogue their symptoms and stages, ever in search of bigger crashes. Things escalate when they are invited to a secretive online community called The Source, full of like-minded virus chasers and inspired by the real-life places frequented by such individuals.

"They're just like the old-fashioned, almost '90s-style message boards where people are talking about their experiences," Seidlinger explains. "But what was so interesting is that it wasn't so difficult to tear away the actual reason for them connecting, which is the virus chasing, to the actual essence of why they connected in the first place, which is most virus chasers are like everyone else in the community, trying to belong, trying to find connection in this world. Their interests just so happen to involve the euphoria of coming off of, you know, that finally-getting-to-the-tail-end-of-a-virus

feeling."

While *The Source* ultimately lets Will and Olivia down, it's in their moment of profound disappointment that Zaff barges into their apartment, setting the remainder of their lives in reality-bending, potentially murderous motion, and turning *The Body Harvest* into a stranger and much more fantastical novel. Zaff may present as a fellow virus chaser, but not only is he terminal, as he tells them, he can manipulate the fabric of reality. He's a veritable storm that arrives, then passes, and changes everything in between, in the most bonkers and graphic/disturbing way possible.

"It is very much as if he just kind of passes through, and they're just there and able to latch on for a bit and live vicariously until they become something more," says Seidlinger. "Someone called him a Tyler Durden-esque character. ... He comes in and makes these far more grandiose assertions about what virus chasing is, what they're actually chasing, and more. There's more to it than just the two characters. In fact, although they are our main characters, I see it as the author looking down at it, like the society is the true character. ... [Will and Olivia] are there, their lives are as important as anyone else's lives, but in the context of that society that surrounds them that we start to see with the introduction of Zaff, it becomes like, oh, wait, so they are in someone else's narrative and in this larger narrative, they are just two of many victims of this larger entity, of what *The Source* implies."

If this sounds like heady stuff, it is. Seidlinger reveals that the book allowed him to not just explore his own relationship with addiction, but also the broader topic of mental health as well as some of society's ills. There's a clear caveat here about being

too trusting of strangers online and a deeper message of not taking everything at face value, as we so often do in our polarized world. Like the best horror stories, *The Body Harvest* is entertaining and unsettling, but also presents a potent warning about the direction of society.

"I'm trying to be more hopeful than pessimistic," Seidlinger says, "but sometimes it's easy to be pessimistic." 🧐





ers. Later, we find ourselves among a labyrinthian cult hidden deep beneath the greatest show on Earth, a show which may well shatter the whole of the world and others beyond.

To enter the Palace Theater is to enter a kaleidoscopic realm of infinite possibilities in which Urbancik's flair for complex world-building is matched only by his knack for instilling an undeniable sense of unsettling curiosity. And, if the clawed beasts with glowing eyes, giant spiders, and backstabbing mystical rivals don't bring you to dust, surviving the secrets of the Palace long enough to unlock its mysteries just might.

RICK HIPSON

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Thomas Ligotti and Brandon Trenz
Chiroptera Press

A Michigan basement is a dug-out crawl-space with an earthen floor and a ceiling so low that one can't stand up straight. That's the perfect microcosm to embody Thomas Ligotti's vision of the world: cold, damp, dark, claustrophobic, and unfit for humanity. That's also the title of the unproduced feature film screenplay which Ligotti co-wrote in the early 2000s with Brandon Trenz. It originated before *Cramp-ton*, the darkest episode of *The X-Files* that never was, also co-written by Ligotti and Trenz and published by Chiroptera Press (in 2023).



The detailed introduction by Trenz explains that this project was originally envisioned as a loose adaptation of "The Last Feast of the Harlequin," one of Ligotti's most celebrated and beloved stories. It was supposed to be directed by E.E. Merhige (*Begotten*, *Shadow of the Vampire*), but the producers apparently considered it too heady, talky, and uncommercial. That's a pity because it reads as just a slightly "normalized" Ligotti.

A young anthropology professor comes to a decrepit town to observe a strange clown festival and to find an old loony professor and ex-mentor, only this time there's an added love interest. There are some offscreen entities tormenting characters who've been abducted and thrown into a Michigan basement where something weird chatters in the dark corners, and the script is lower on holiday-time melancholy and higher on horror action than its literary source, but the core ideas and bleak spirit are still there.

For Ligotti acolytes, *Michigan Basement* is a hidden gem finally brought to light as an exciting thought-experiment in what might have been. For those who never quite "got" Ligotti's odd gloominess, this script may be the perfect gateway drug. Come for the "Stranger in a Strangeland of Small-Town Americana," stay for the metaphysical terror.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

LIBRARY OF THE DAMNED

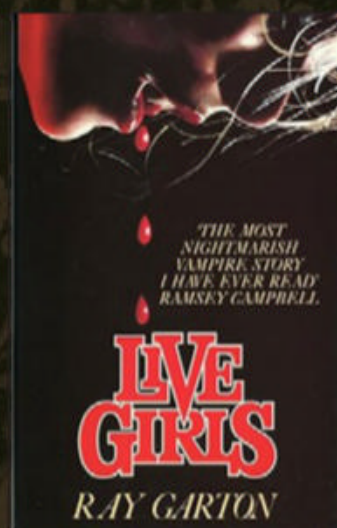
STOP THE REAPER

Anyone else feel like the Grim Reaper has been working overtime lately, especially in the horror genre? Between last issue and this one, we've grieved more than one notable American horror author.

First, James A. Moore left us on March 27 at age 58 after a lengthy battle with cancer. Moore was a generous and prolific writer who worked in several mediums. He published more than 25 novels and novellas, as well as many short stories. His 2003 novel, *Serenity Falls*, about a town with sinister secrets, was nominated for a Bram Stoker Award for Best Novel, while his 2006 novella, *Bloodstained Oz* (with Christopher Golden), drew a Best Long Form Fiction nom. Moore also wrote the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds* novelization (based on the 2003 video game), original stories for the *Alien* franchise, and a number of supplements and game materials for *Vampire: The Masquerade*, *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, *Mage: The Ascension*, and *Wraith: The Oblivion*, among others. Additionally, he served as co-editor on several horror anthologies, including *The Twisted Book of Shadows* (2019) and *West of Hell: Weird Western Horror Stories* (2022).



Less than a month later, on April 22, we lost Ray Garton, who died at age 61, shortly after being diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer. Unlike Moore, I never met nor interviewed Garton, but always appreciated his outspoken nature on Facebook, where he frequently criticized the work of paranormal investigators Ed and Lorraine Warren, who hired him in the 1990s to write *In a Dark Place*, concerning the Snedeker family (Google the full story; seriously, it's worth it). It could be said Garton's career had two sides, the one horror fans are most familiar with, in which he published dark and twisted fiction such as the vampire novel *Live Girls* (nominated Best Novel in the 1987 Bram Stoker Awards), *Shackled* (1997), and *Ravenous* (2009), and his young adult work under the pen name Joseph Locke, which includes *Petrified* (1992), *Game Over* (1993), *1-900-Killer* (1994), and more. He also penned a number of TV and film novelizations, most notable among them *Nightmare on Elm Street 4* and *5*, *Invaders from Mars*, and *Warlock*.



Both Moore and Garton will be sorely missed by family, friends, and their many readers; may they live ever on in the impressive bodies of work they leave behind. R.I.P. gentlemen.

Now, could someone please convince the Reaper to cool it? You know, maybe take a nice seaside vacay somewhere tropical; kick up those feet, crack open a beach book, and work on a tan. Because goodbyes suck, and so does cancer.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

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THE FRIGHT GALLERY

CURATED BY PAIGE REYNOLDS

219



THIS MONTH:
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Late Night with the Devil



WARNING! MAY BE DISTURBING TO SOME VIEWERS

FROM THE PRODUCERS OF PARANORMAL ACTIVITY AND BARBARIAN

IFC FILMS SHUDDER AND IMAGE NATION PRESENT A PRODUCTION BY VICKSTEEN AND SPOOKY PICTURES "LATE NIGHT WITH THE DEVIL" STARRING DAVID GASTALUCHAN LAURA GORDON VAN BLESS THAYSSAL DAZI
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R X MP NC-17 AGC IFC FILMS SHUDDER

Currently dominating the film poster and home video world, Sister Hyde's designs are raw, gritty, and bold. You may recognize her work from frequent collaborations with A24, Criterion, Shudder, and Arrow Video, who depend on her to bring their new and classic movie posters to life. Sister Hyde's style evokes the spirit of film art from the 1970s and '80s with vivid, eye-catching imagery, smart typography, and striking textures.

HOMETOWN HAUNT

"I'm originally from Carmel, Indiana, but have lived in Chicago, Florida, and for the past eight years, Los Angeles, California."

WEAPON OF CHOICE

"I work mostly in Photoshop, however, I do everything I can to make my pieces feel as handmade as possible, more like found, pre-existing objects rather than something created within a computer. I bring in practical textures, handmade collages, digital illustration, and collaborate with photographers and illustrators whenever I can. I lean on typography and photo treatments inspired by 1970s and '80s poster design, tightly kerned and customized type, high-contrast images reduced down to their bare essentials."

DEEDS

"The one thing I still can't believe is that I get to work with the amazing team at the Criterion Collection. Their nearly 40 years of incredible artwork introduced me to the most important films in my life and then in turn inspired me to pick up a pen and design film art myself. The work of Eric Skillman, Sarah Habibi, Sam Smith, F. Ron Miller, Adam Maida, Art Chantry, Jay Shaw, and so many others inspire me daily, to have pieces stand beside theirs still doesn't feel real."

MY NIGHTMARE FUEL

"I'm deeply inspired by movies, from everyone from Mario Bava and Lucio Fulci to Luis Buñuel and [Rainer Werner] Fassbinder, all the way to Hal Needham, John Waters, and Russ Meyer, but even more broadly by entertainment and pop art from the '60s through the '80s."

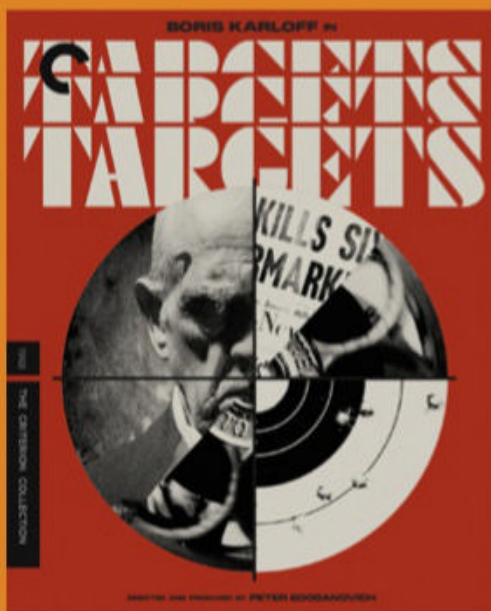
LAST WORDS

"The best advice I can give is to stay kind and curious. Take in as much as you can from as many different places as you can. Don't be afraid to put in the work, make bad stuff, reach out to friends or people you look up to for input, and keep trying new things to find your voice, while also setting boundaries and taking care of yourself. You can't sustainably make art if you're running yourself into the ground."

RESTING PLACE

Find Sister Hyde at sisterhydedesign.com and on Instagram @hydesister. She also co-hosts a podcast with screenwriter Joshua Conkel called *Bloodhaus* that can be found wherever you get your podcasts.

FOLLOW PAIGE ON INSTAGRAM
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A DUMPSTER DIVE INTO HORROR'S ODDS & CURIOS

DEVILS IN THE DETAILS

BY
STACIE
PONDER

WHILST EVERY SUBGENRE
ACROSS THE HORROR DIAS-
PORA HAS ITS LOYAL FANS AND

detractors, perhaps none is as divisive and debated as ye olde found footage. For every person who pukes their pants in excitement and fear during a shaky-cam flick, there's a stony-faced someone else puking their pants in boredom (and maybe actual nausea, thanks to said shaky cam). As for me, I am decidedly in the former camp, an unabashed, unapologetic found-footage freak who will give any attempt at it – no matter how home-cooked or messy – a whirl.

And boy oh boy, is a lot of it home-cooked and messy. Technological advances and the subsequent democratization of filmmaking have made found footage the D.I.Y. go-to format for many a backyard horror director with a dollar and a dream. Scripts, crews, and professional actors aren't needed when bullet points and friends will suffice. Toss in some of the now-requisite tropes (the bickering/joking scene in the car on the way to Scary Place, the setting up of stationary cameras, a climax filled with indecipherable screaming and nausea-inducing running, the refusal to stop filming, and finally, someone getting dragged off into darkness by Scary Thing) and join the swollen glut of found-footage flicks available on any and every streaming service. If you're wondering who in the world sees the one-star rating and the green iMovie filter "night vision" screencap and eagerly dives into something called, like, *Curse of the Haunted Paranormal Encounter*, well, I do. It's me, hello.

Look, I can't help myself, okay? It's that central conceit, the whole *this is a scary thing that really happened* idea, that keeps me coming back for more. It's fascinating to see how filmmakers try to pull this off, to witness their attempts (and occasional success) at obliterating the fourth wall *War of the Worlds*-style, making us believe. As corny as it may sound, it's a bit of magic, in its way; something of a wink and a nod between the movie and the audience where we all agree that we're watching actual events as they unfolded.

In an ideal scenario, we are *completely* drawn in, the line between fact and fiction becomes blurred, and authenticity, for whatever that word is worth, is achieved. It happened with found-footage progenitor *Cannibal Holocaust*, which was so convincing that director Ruggero Deodato wound up charged with obscenity and murder, forced to prove that the victims in his film were, in fact, still alive and not impaled on a vertical spit. It happened with *The Blair Witch Project*, when my friend asked me on the way home from the theatre if that was the actual *actual* footage they

found under the house or if it was all re-enactments.

And therein lies the detail that beats on my brain like hands on a tent in the woods near Burkittsville: that if what we're seeing is true, that would mean we're essentially picking up some popcorn and watching snuff films down at the local cineplex. It's a bit of madness, really, to think that theatres would allow it, that distributors would try it, and that audiences would flock to it. Sure, there are the morbidly curious among us, but I'd wager that the overlap between snuff fans and horror fans is smaller than you might expect. I don't know about you, but I left any desire to watch anything remotely snuffy back in my edgy horror teen phase, when I occasionally dabbled in *Faces of Death*. But despite my staunch "no snuff stuff" agenda, here I sit, hoping that *Curse of the Haunted Paranormal Encounter* will convince me it's real to the point of calling the FBI to demand they do something about those kids who were dragged into darkness during their livestreamed ghost-hunting expedition.

If found footage is Schrödinger's subgenre – that is to say, it's simultaneously genuine and bogus until you stop and think about it for more than a second – then I suppose I'm Schrödinger's found-footage fan; wanting it to be real but also not wanting it to be real while knowing the whole time it's not real... and so long as a director with a dollar and a dream won't stop filming, I won't stop watching. 🖤



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DAVE NEABORE

Star Feels

CADABRA RECORDS

Dog Eat Dog bassist (and horror memorabilia collector extraordinaire) Dave Neabore is back with a very synthwavy EP follow-up to his horror/sci-fi soundtrack-inspired *Retro Inferno*. It's impossible not to love *Star Feels'* opener "Power Plan," an absolutely hip-shaking '80s dance number that will put you in a good mood no matter the circumstances. Next, the title track directly calls *Stranger Things'* iconic score to mind (yet also Robyn's "Dancing on My Own") with a hilariously appropriate vocoder handling the vocals. Over on side B, you've got "Delayed Green" sounding more in the vein of '80s Tangerine Dream playing in a dark goth club. "Night Shift" closes off this journey with some Daft Punk-styled darkwave vibes. No matter what planet you're from, this record rocks.

☠☠☠☠½ AVL

ELECTRONIC

blue cover painted by Xasthur vocalist and California boy Scott "Malefic" Conner. The perfect soundtrack to a life of misery, *Disharmonic Variations* serves as a wordless psychological horror story, as haunting as the aftermath of a bad acid trip. Formed in 1995 as a black metal outfit, Xasthur has experimented with various styles to birth previously unimaginable forms of sonic atrocities, and *Disharmonic Variations* continues its trend of transcending genre. The originality of the album strengthens the effect of its uncanny and often depressing atmospheres, which grip listeners like well-fitted nooses. ☠☠☠☠ JD



EARTH TONGUE

Great Haunting

IN THE RED

This second album from Earth Tongue sounds like the band had a wild time of it: stumbling out of the desert, eyes bulging, dehydrated and babbling incoherently about escaping from a sun-worshipping death cult. The nine tracks feature titles such as "Bodies Dissolve Tonight!" and "Sit Next to Satan," so it's perhaps unsurprising that *Great Haunting* takes its conceptual cues from '70s and '80s horror cinema. This bleeds into the vibe of the music too, because while every track might thump away heartily, there's also a weird, washed-out quality that smacks of a VHS tape that's been watched a few times too many. Gussie Larkin's hefty, fuzz-drenched riffs bring to mind acts like Bala, Black Cobra, and Queens of the Stone Age, while her vocals are somewhere between a croon and a ritual chant – a devilish concoction that should have fans of crunchy, psych-addled rock keen to sign their wretched souls away. ☠☠☠☠½ AD

ROCK



UNCLE ACID & THE DEADBEATS

Nell' ora blu

RISE ABOVE

Ever since John Carpenter and company started releasing *Lost Themes*, there's been a run of folks offering soundtracks for nonexistent films. The ghouls of Uncle Acid have better form than most when it comes to cinematic subject matter, steeped as their retro rock is in gauzy murder fantasies and murky cult rituals. So, how does the *giallo*-inspired *Nell' ora blu* fare? Depends on your perspective, really. It does genuinely sound like it could have slunk from some sordid slasher of the late '60s or early '70s: creepy, immersive, and gloweringly atmospheric, with the cues and snippets of Italian dialogue lending it the feel of an authentic archive piece. However, if you want the wall-to-wall Cheap-Trick-gone-spooky bangers of prior albums *Blood Lust* or *Wasteland*, then you're in the wrong place:

ROCK

a handful of such rippers are tossed in like discarded murder weapons, but this one's definitely more about vibes than unbridled rock 'n' roll noise pollution. ☠☠☠☠ AD



THE LURKING CORPSES

Lurking After Midnight

HELLS HEADBANGERS

Is it horror punk or is it metal? The latest from Indiana's The Lurking Corpses is both; *Lurking After Midnight* is the band's fifth album and first in a decade, once again bringing its own unique sound combining horror-relevant genres. If you're unfamiliar, imagine Graves-era Misfits, cross-pollinated with harder-hitting extreme metal. The majority of *Lurking After Midnight* is solid horror punk with excellent earworm hooks; standout tracks "Burned Alive" and "This Night With You" are prime examples of this predictable but oh-so-catchy formula. Meanwhile, "My Sweet Le-

PUNK



XASTHUR

Disharmonic Variations

LUPUS LOUNGE

The legendary Xasthur's thirteen-song *Disharmonic Variations* presents listeners with a gorgeous all-American nightmare. A paradigm of creative freedom and bravery, this offering features a red, white, and

FOLK

MIAUX

Never Coming Back

VIERNULVIER

Beginning life as an alternative live score for Herk Harvey's 1962 classic *Carnival of Souls*, *Never Coming Back* sees the pieces reworked and reconstructed for a beguiling new album. Working with just a synthesizer, composer Miaux (a.k.a. Mia Prce) carefully constructs a strange, elegant, gauzy sonic world that's by turns tranquil, moody, and unnerving. Gradual swells of sound and tremulous melodies unfurl at a leisurely pace, with standout tracks including the slow-to-boil "The old pavilion near the lake" and the ominous "What's the matter with everyone, why don't they answer me?" channelling the film's portentous atmosphere while marking this out as something fresh and distinct. Less overt (and less churchy) than Gene Moore's original score, *Never Coming Back* is more aligned with the likes of Popol Vuh and Tangerine Dream. It's minimal, experimental, and akin to viewing the world through an opaque veil – or, perhaps more fittingly, the windshield of a car sinking into a slow-moving river. ☠☠☠☠ AD

ELECTRONIC





PODCASTS FROM BEYOND

TEEN CREEPS

THEME: YA Pulp Novels

FORMAT: Discussion

FREQUENCY: Weekly

Most horror fans can trace back their love for the genre to a certain moment in their youth, whether it be happening upon a scary movie on television, imitating the interests of an older sibling, or purchasing their first *Goosebumps* at the school book fair. Elder Millennials Lindsay Katai and Kelly Nugent have a particular affinity for the '90s, where paperbacks about terrible things happening to babysitters and cheerleaders reigned supreme. In fact, they cherish this era so much that they created their own podcast about formative young adult pulp novels. Launched in 2016, the *Teen Creeps* podcast has recorded over 400 episodes thus far, focusing on content from heavy hitters such as Christopher Pike and R.L. Stine, but also Diane Hoh, Caroline B. Cooney, V.C. Andrews, and Lois Duncan. The “spooky” issues of popular non-genre hit teen series’ such as *Sweet Valley High*, *Nancy Drew*, and *The Babysitters Club* are also included.

Each episode usually starts with a recitation of the book’s back cover or Goodreads blurb before the hosts launch into a swirling analysis that often lasts between one and two hours. Rather than discussing the story from the perspective of a reader, they draw from their respective acting careers and insert themselves into the narrative, re-enacting scenes as they summarize the story. Often indulging (or perhaps regressing) into mean girl tendencies, they speak about the characters as if they know them personally, as though gossiping about classmates during a sleepover. While they have no problem openly mocking cringe-worthy moments in the story or calling some characters “losers,” they stop short of trashing the author’s skills. Both professional writers themselves, the hosts provide insight into why certain aspects of the book did or didn’t work, and what could have made it better.

More of a conversation than a structured presentation, *Teen Creeps* is best suited to listeners who are looking for a fun romp rather than a polished lecture. The episodes are full of tangents and rants, which end up expanding the focus far beyond the book at hand. While the subject matter is youthful, the podcast is truly for anyone – many listeners will enjoy reminiscing about their tender horror beginnings along with the hosts, who often discuss how they viewed the novel when they first read it versus how they experience it now. Younger listeners, or those just getting into horror fiction, might benefit most, as they’re essentially being spoon-fed the most prolific YA reading list of all time. Even the most seasoned horror reader is bound to come across a book or two that they’ve never read within this sprawling library.

JESSICA BUCK



nore” is a banger ballad that perfectly blends both metal and horror punk gang vocal elements for a satisfyingly heavy close-out. A great return after nearly a decade in the crypt.

☠☠☠ PL



GHOST ON MARS

Out of Time and Space

WILLOWTIP

Willowtip Records has carved quite a niche for itself over the years, releasing some of the most baffling heavy metal you’ll find this side of Hades. While the label’s stock-in-trade has been quicksilver technicality and yawning discords, recent times have seen it tip headfirst into some genuinely wild prog, with the debut full-length from Ghost On Mars the latest case in point. Equal parts Yes, Cynic, and *Jeff Wayne’s Musical Version of The War of The Worlds*, the album title might suggest some sort of Lovecraftian love-in but instead we’re treated to an ambitious opus exploring works like *The Mist*, *They Live*, *[Rec]*, and the *Dylan Dog* series. Gleaming riffs are thrown up like spires towards the heavens before being draped with gloomy, breathily-intoned melodies and surrounded by handsome arpeggios – a lofty but undeniably potent mix that’s almost too pretty at times for the pitch black subject matter. ☠☠☠ AD



DELIRIA

Phantasm

(INDEPENDENT)

Say the word “Phantasm” to any self-respecting horror fan and they’ll likely grin lopsidedly, hallucinatory visions flicking before their eyes as they imagine a strange fly-

ing orb attempting to drill out their brain. Not a bad metaphor for Deliria’s second album, really, which careens between genres, touching base with black metal, djent, prog, and post-rock as it does a number on your noggin. Things crunch, soar, and fracture as vocalist Adam Rupp shrieks up the last meal he ate, rasping out tales of depression, desperation, and demonic possession. Despite its caustic nature, *Phantasm* is based on strong melodic foundations which means it never gets too out of hand – a point that might serve as a blessing for some listeners but does put Deliria in a relatively tame place compared to the true outré nightmare-fodder of bands like Thantifaxath, Sepetus, and Imperial Triumphant. ☠☠☠ AD



SIX FEET UNDER

Killing For Revenge

METAL BLADE

Since its debut album *Haunted* released way back in '95, Six Feet Under has notoriously put out material with mixed results. *Killing For Revenge* is the band’s fourteenth full-length release and its second collaboration with Cannibal Corpse alumni Jack Owen. The vocal production on the last one was a bit rough, resulting in “eeeeee” memes and fan speculation that Barnes had wrecked his voice, but *Killing For Revenge* will dispel those naysayers as the vocal mix is way tighter, making for a beast of an album. Opener “Know Nothing Ingrate” kicks things off with a fast Kreator-esque thrash riff before slowing down for a couple of incredibly heavy tracks, “Hostility Against Mankind” and “Neanderthal.” No stranger to covers, the band wraps things up with a version of Nazareth’s “Hair of the Dog” which absolutely fits with the attitude of this album. A great return to form from these classic death metal heavyweights.

☠☠☠ PL

SCORED TO



AUTHOR J. BLAKE FICHERA HAS BEEN MAKING A NAME FOR HIMSELF OVER THE YEARS AS AN AUTHORITY ON MUSIC IN HORROR MOVIES, THANKS TO his books *Scored to Death* (2016) and *Scored to Death 2* (2020); both are collections of interviews with some of the greats, including John Carpenter, Charles Bernstein, Richard Band, and more. But you know what's even more exciting than reading a collection of interviews? Watching them! That's right, Fichera is working on the first *Scored to Death* documentary as we speak and, like many, is relying on good ol' crowdfunding to help raise money. One of the first gifts for donors has just arrived – *Scored To Death: Musique d'Horreur* is a vinyl edition compilation of horror score covers from the likes of Steve Moore, Wojciech Golczewski, and Voyag3r, with a general retail version to come.

"I tried to avoid approaching composers who are featured in the documentary and my books," Fichera tells *Rue Morgue*. "I instead reached out to people I admired, who I hadn't bugged before, and who I thought would believe in the documentary enough to say yes. I had personal relationships or social media relations with some of them, but I didn't know Steve Moore, Will and Brooke Blair, or the band Anima Morte at all before this. I was just a fan."

Each artist was given free rein to choose their own track, with Fichera acknowledging that they would do their best work on music that personally excited them. The result is a mix of popular themes from *The Omen*, *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, and *Phantasm*, and lesser-known themes from *Stepfather II*, *Puppet Master*, and 2009 slasher *Basement Jack*.

"We both loved the 1992 film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* for many reasons," say Brooke and Will Blair, best known for scoring Jeremy Saulnier's moody flicks *Blue Ruin* and *Green Room*. "The score has an amazing feel of timelessness about it. We wanted to maintain a lot of the original intention of the music, with a slightly modern update, mainly in the use of synths for the melody and atmospheric elements. We used vintage analog synthesizers (Roland Juno 106 and a Moog Prodigy) as well as modern 'in the box' soft synths and effects."

Meanwhile, Holly Amber Church (who worked on Guillermo del Toro's *Cabinet of Curiosities*) gives her take on Wendy Carlos' "Main Title" from *The Shining*.

"I love how eerie Wendy's music is over the opening sequence of the film," says Church. "Wendy was a pioneer in electronic music, so I wanted to pay homage to that in my cover, using electronic instruments to play the main melody, harmonies, and counterlines and with some jarring, creepy sounds thrown in to really encapsulate the feel of her score."

Sticking with the classic horror theme, modern master Golczewski (*We Are Still Here*, *Night of the Wolf*) contributes an offering from *The Omen* but not the one you expect. Rather than the famous "Ave Satani," he conjures his own gothic version of "Lullaby for Damien Thorn."

"*The Omen* is one of my faves of all time," he says. "I didn't want to go one to one with it and just change the instrumentalization or the character, so I decided to go more into the ambient side of things and make something closer to a lullaby out of it. Just a chill track with a lot of air and calm (before the storm). Hopefully the baby Damien can have some good sleep to this one."

Fichera himself gets in on the action with a cover of "Profondo Rosso," since no collection of horror music is complete without some Goblin.

"As an absolute Goblin fanatic," he says. "I was a little disappointed that no one was covering one of their tracks. So, I bought a MIDI controller, taught

myself how to use Logic Pro, and asked my pal (metal drumming icon) Richard Christy [of Death] to play drums on a cover of 'Profondo Rosso.' Considering that it is literally the first thing I ever recorded on my own using a computer, I don't think it turned out too bad. It is worth noting that Richard also contributed his own very cool and heavy version of something from John Carpenter's *The Fog*."

All in all, not a bad collection for the horror soundtrack set. Throw *Scored to Death: Musique d'Horreur* on the turntable and get yourself pumped for the documentary, hopefully next year. 🧛



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SFB Games
PC, PlayStation 4/5, Xbox X/S

The retro gaming craze shows no signs of slowing – the only thing that's shifting is what's considered retro. While many indie horror games have cashed in on the 8-bit '80s era of gaming, SFB Games' surprise hit *Crow Country* sets its story and aesthetic in the '90s, when early Playstation titles dabbled in 3-D perspective, effectively revolutionizing how players could navigate game environments. *Crow Country* conveys much of the charm of that era with its fuzzy pixels, clunky controls, and a storyline that takes unexpected turns.

As special agent Mara Forest, players are commissioned to investigate the disappearance of Edward Crow, founder of the long-abandoned theme park known as Crow Country, which not only stands in disrepair but is overrun with dead-

ly, misshapen creatures. It'll take more than puzzling and problem-solving for Mara to uncover Crow Country's secrets (assuming you choose violence over the peaceful "exploration mode") while navigating the various worlds of the theme park (the Swan Boats, the Ocean Kingdom, and – our favourite – the Haunted Hilltop). Staff memos, news clippings, and surprise NPC appearances unravel the secrets that ol' Eddie tried to bury, including revelations concerning Mara and her take-no-shit attitude.

The '90s nostalgia factor is real here, for better or worse – if your memories of the first *Resident Evil* games are wrought with fondness or frustration, you're bound to a similar fate with *Crow Country*. It's a survival horror game (if you choose it to be), so ammo is scarce; but more agonizing, at least at first, is the awkward aiming mechanism that makes precise shooting near-impossible, even with the help of laser sight upgrades. Also tedious is the fact that enemies will spawn suddenly in rooms you've al-



ready been to, slowing things down and possibly halting your puzzle-solving momentum. Still, the puzzles are challenging but rewarding, and the story is surprisingly engaging with several possible twist endings you won't see coming – even as you feel like you're looking back on the past.

ANDREA SUBISSATI



HEADSHOTS: QUIRKY SENSE OF HUMOUR, HIGH REPLAY VALUE, EXPLORATION MODE FOR THE PACIFISTS
MISFIRES: FRUSTRATING CONTROLS, ENEMIES ARE MORE ANNOYING THAN CHALLENGING



LIFE EATER

Strange Scaffold
PC

Until I can convince the powers that be to buy me a Meta Quest 3 so I can play *Hide the Corpse*, I'll have to make do with *Life Eater*, which is also a game about avoiding detection, but for far darker purposes.

Players take on the role of Ralph, a suburban druid who, once a year, must conduct surveillance on his neighbours so he can abduct and kill the one (or more than one) that meets his dark god Zimforth's demands and delay the end of the world. A variety of actions (with different costs) can be undertaken to reveal the lives and schedules of those Ralph must investigate, including stealing laptops, sending phishing emails, lurking in a van, etc. Uncovering his neighbour's actions will determine not just the intended target,

but also the necessary personal info to ensure Ralph's ritual does not fail (for instance, if the target commutes to work, a different rib will need to be removed than if he/she doesn't). Kill the wrong person, excise more than one incorrect body part or be too obvious while snooping, and the year will need to be restarted.

Life Eater's narrative game lasts ten body harvests (a.k.a. years) and can be finished in a couple hours. An endless mode was recently added to up the replay factor. While Steam bills this as a "horror fantasy kidnapping simulator," it feels more like a genre video game version of those deduction-based logic puzzles from elementary school, in which you use a series of facts to match up people with items or actions, only in this case, there's no handy grid chart to help.

That's not to say *Life Eater* isn't a bit addictive, especially for those who enjoy deductive reasoning, but aside from the cut scenes and the



organ/rib removal ritual, which is quite tame, this is light on chills and heavy on memory work. An acquired taste, end of the world be damned.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



HEADSHOTS: STRONG PREMISE, EASY-TO-LEARN MECHANICS, EMOTIVE CUTSCENE ARTWORK
MISFIRES: STORY GAME TOO SHORT, NOT ENOUGH VARIETY IN RITUAL QUESTIONS

HORROR CULTURE



RUE MORQUE
TV



RUE MORGUE SUPPORTS EQUALITY IN THE GENRE WITHOUT QUESTION, BUT DOES A FILMMAKER'S GENDER AFFECT VIEWER INTEREST IN WATCHING THEIR MOVIES? TWO OF OUR WRITERS BATTLE IT OUT!

DOES THE GENDER OF A FILMMAKER MATTER TO YOU WHEN WATCHING A HORROR MOVIE?

YES!

JERRY J. SAMPSON

"It matters to acknowledge that, while every filmmaker has a right to tell any story they want, not every filmmaker is given the same opportunity to do so."

WHILE THE GENDER OF A FILMMAKER DOESN'T EXPRESSLY MATTER TO ME INsofar as what horror I choose to watch, the gender of a filmmaker does matter. On the surface, it isn't about who is telling the story, but how the story is being told, and isn't that just a nice, uncomplicated way to look at it all? But I've learned that we really must look deeper at the nuances of the genre and that it does, at times, benefit from a gender-specific approach.

Take, for example, rape-revenge movies. Most of the films I've examined of this subgenre are written and directed by men, and while I find great catharsis and cultural significance in *I Spit on Your Grave* and *Last House on the Left*, both stories are depicted from a male gaze. Groan, I know but, like it or not, it's a thing. There's a perspective missing from those stories, an inherent lack of insight into how it feels to experience very specific types of fear in very specific scenarios.

That viewpoint is brilliantly captured in Coralie Fargeat's *Revenge*, one of the grittiest, bloodiest, and overall best rape-revenge films out there. Watching *Revenge*, I knew it was the brainchild of a woman. It was a simple gut feeling that this filmmaker knows fear, loves the horror genre, and tackled the subject from her own perspective.

Women want to tell fucked-up stories, we want to be as dark and twisted as men are permitted to be. We want to be given a franchise reboot with the same resources as a dude, to be able to mess it up and still be given another shot. So, it matters to acknowledge that while every filmmaker has a right to tell any story they want, not every filmmaker is given the same opportunity to do so, and that simple admission opens the door a little wider to a diversity of voices that we ought to hear. 🍷

NO!

JENN ADAMS

"If we believe that only women can make acceptable films about women, we imply that the reverse is also true: only men can create worthwhile films about men."

THE GENDER OF A FILMMAKER DOES NOT MATTER TO ME WHEN WATCHING A HORROR FILM. WE FREQUENTLY CREDIT THE CATHARTIC EXPERIENCE OF FEELING "seen" by a movie to the gender of the person behind the camera, but that's just one piece of a larger puzzle, like script, location, casting, etc. Many horror buffs find the rape-revenge subgenre to be heavily influenced by gender identity, and it's true that *Revenge* and *M.F.A.*, both written and directed by women, effectively capture the unique experience of surviving sexual assault. However, I find just as much catharsis in Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* and I don't believe a particular gender is inherently more likely to treat the subject differently.

Filmmakers who align with the genders of their protagonists can bring out intimate details in sensitive stories. Amy Holden Jones' *The Slumber Party Massacre* skewers the male gaze while David Cronenberg's *The Brood* explores divorce through the eyes of a single father, but the reverse can also be true. *Inside* (Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury) captures the visceral horror of childbirth while *The Autopsy of Jane Doe* (André Øvredal) is a feminist view of bodily autonomy. By the same token, Mary Lambert and Mary Harron have created brutal studies of male fragility in *Pet Sematary* and *American Psycho* respectively.

Furthermore, gender exists on a spectrum and may change over the course of a filmmaker's lifetime. If a director transitions, does that lessen or elevate the quality of an earlier film?

I'm an outspoken feminist, but I don't want a creative world limited by gender. If we believe that only women can make acceptable films about women, we imply that the reverse is also true: only men can create worthwhile films about men. I value filmmakers who reflect on their choices, interrogate their biases, and create a safe space for diverse collaborators to speak up when something doesn't ring true. We are each inspired and limited by our own lenses and experiences, and that's okay. 🍷



LAST ISSUE'S WINNER
AS VOTED BY YOU ON FACEBOOK

HAVE VIDEO GAMES BECOME MORE FRIGHTENING THAN HORROR MOVIES?

YES

21%

79%

NO

VIDEO GAMES HAVE YET TO BEAT HORROR MOVIES FOR SCARE FACTOR.

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